THE PRISONER AT 50

THE SECRET WORLD OF PATRICK MCGOOHAN

UNEASY RIDERS MOTORCYCLISTS AND PHANTOM HITCHHIKERS

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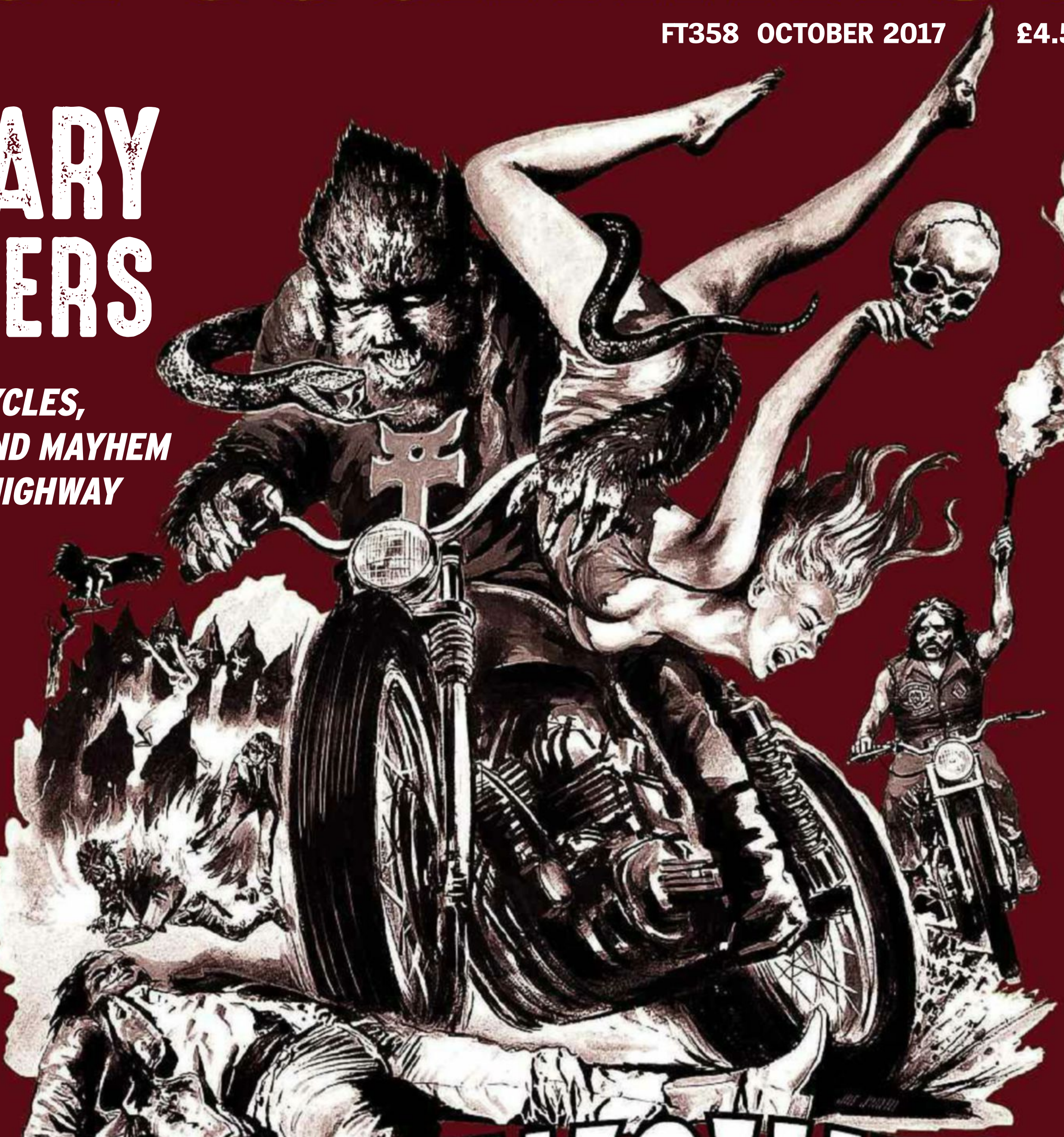

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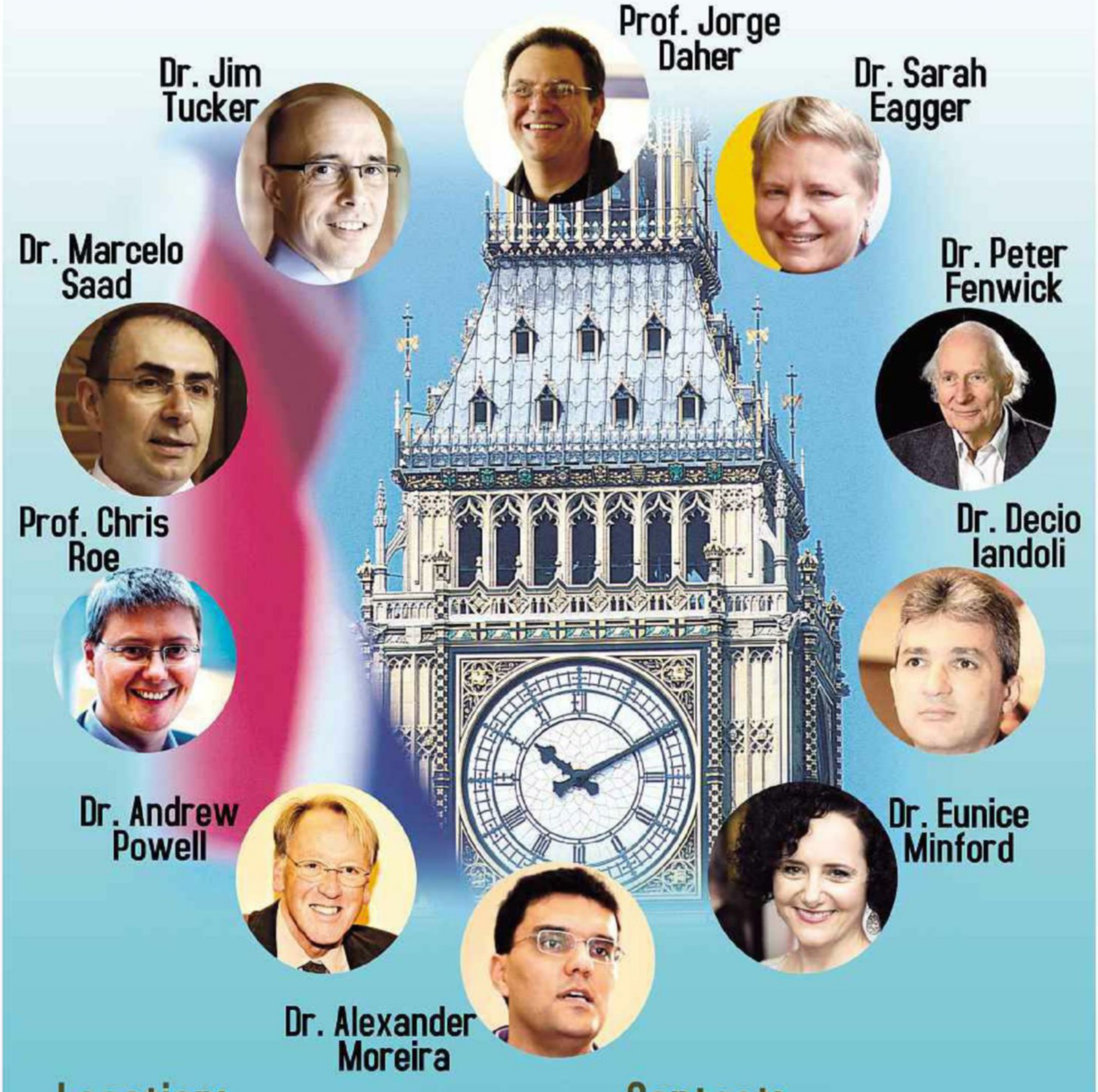

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ForteanTimes
SCARY BIKERS
WEREWOLVES ON WHEELS

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Why fortean ?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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Patrick McGoohan's *The Prisoner* is as relevant now as it was 50 years ago says **BRIAN J ROBB**. Packed with allusions to the Illuminati, the police state, brainwashing, and hidden influences on society, it is a text that is still being unpacked five decades on.

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COVER IMAGE: ALAMY STOCK PHOTO
PRISONER IMAGE: COURTESY OF ITV

ALL HEADER ICONS THROUGHOUT THE MAGAZINE BY CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

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EDITORIAL

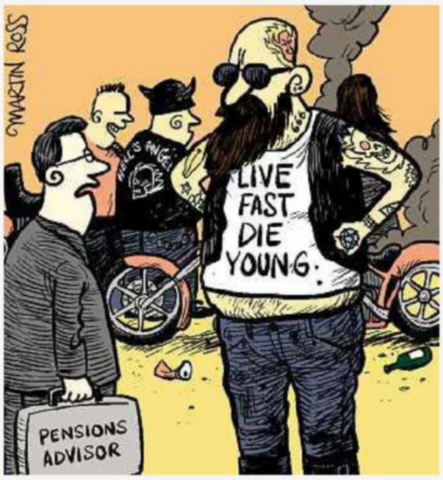
CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

THE PROJECT 5% APPEAL

In her recent 'UFO Files' columns columns Jenny Randles described the launch of a new project involving *FT* readers which hopes to bring a fortean approach to examining close encounters. Now that PROJECT 5% is up and running, Jenny has given us an update to share:

"A varied team has been put together from those offering help and I will report back regularly in my monthly column on progress.

"Even without joining the team you can assist by reading the following questions and sending any true life experiences that you, or someone you trust, has had that match any of these categories. Anonymity will be guaranteed if you or they prefer not to be identified." Please mark your responses 'Project 5%' and send to: nufon@btinternet.com



"Well, if you ever feel differently, let me know."

1. Have you ever had an odd feeling that you were about to see something strange in the sky AND as you looked up there was something there? Or, indeed, there was nothing there but the 'feeling' persisted?

2. Have you ever seen anything strange in the sky AND felt curious physical effects at the same time involving your eyes, ears or other part of your body? Or have you experienced any unusual physical, emotional or mental events after a strange event occurred?

3. Have you ever seen anything strange in the sky AND around the same time noticed physical effects around you – on your car, or radio, or other electrical equipment or any part of the immediate environment?

4. Have you managed to obtain physical evidence of something strange in the sky such as a photograph, video or audio recording?

5. Have you ever found anything close to the scene of something strange in the sky that did not appear to belong to the local area and that you could not identify?

RARE ROAD GHOSTS

As Rob Gandy notes in his 'Uneasy Riders' feature in this month's biker-heavy issue, phantom hitchhiker and road ghost encounters involving motorcyclists rather than drivers appear to be a surprisingly small sub-set of an otherwise fairly widespread phenomenon. Rob has made an impressive effort to collect existing examples of these stories, and has unearthed some previously unknown ones too. Can any *FT* readers help with any further examples, especially first-hand, of such encounters? If so, please write to the usual address.

ERRATA

FT354:5: Nils Erik Grande emailed to point out a mistake in the 'Conspirasphere' column: "Noel Rooney refers to something he calls 'Boolean algorithms'. As one would be hard-pressed to find an algorithm that was not Boolean in some respect or other, I suspect he means Bayesian, which is something else entirely."

FT355:10: Richard Freeman enjoyed Rob Gandy's write-up of this year's Weird Weekend North, but noted that "he did, however, confuse feet with inches in the case of the Mongolian deathworm. There do indeed seem to be two kinds, one reddish and about two feet long, the second grey and about 18 *inches* rather than 18 feet in length."

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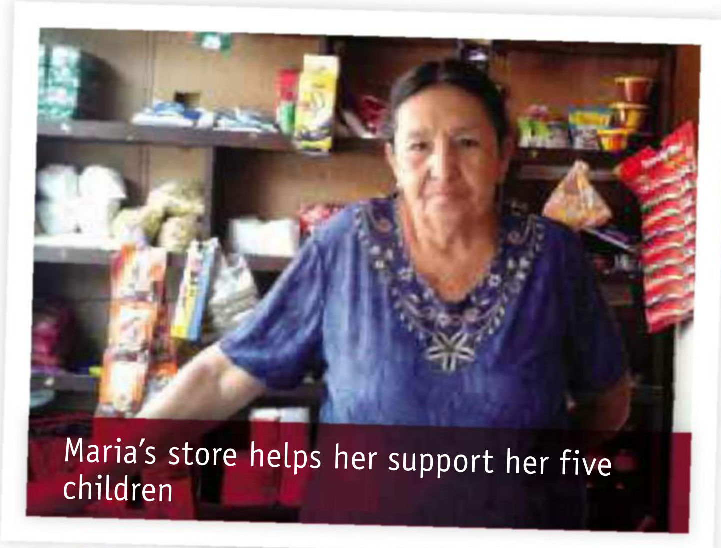

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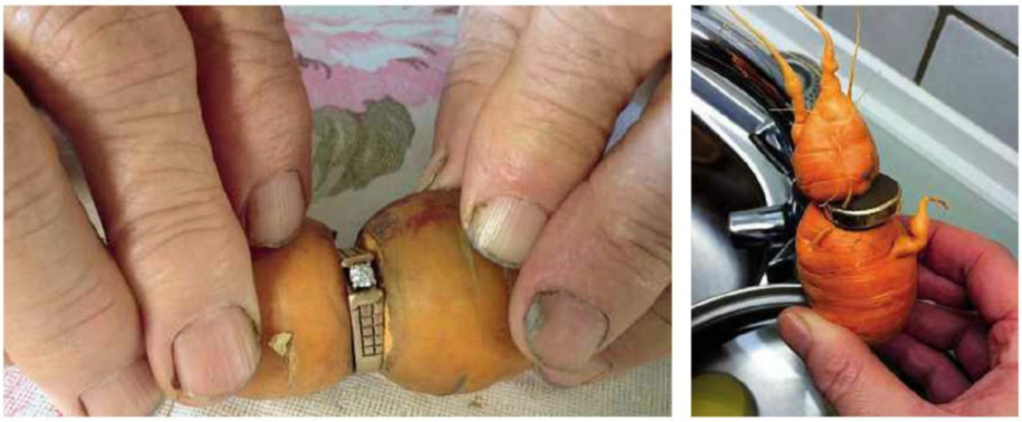
A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

RETURN OF THE WANDERING RINGS

Rings and their owners reunited after years thanks to carrots, babies and a "dodgy-looking curry"



ABOVE LEFT: Mary Grams lost her engagement ring 13 years ago while weeding on the family farm in Alberta, Canada.
ABOVE RIGHT: Another ring encircling a carrot, this one found in Germany and reunited with its unnamed owner.

Mary Grams, an 84-year-old widow from Canada, was devastated when she lost her diamond engagement ring while weeding on the family farm in Alberta in 2004. Her husband Norman had given it to her in 1951. Out of embarrassment, she decided not to tell her husband, but let her son into the secret. She went out and bought a slightly cheaper replacement ring, and carried on as if nothing had happened.

The secret was kept for 13 years until 14 August 2017 when her daughter-in-law Colleen Daley, who now lives on the farm where Mrs Grams used to live, dug up some carrots in the garden. While washing a rather lumpy carrot, she discovered it had grown through a ring. Her son instantly guessed the ring's identity, and called his mother. At first she thought he was having her on. The ring held plenty of sentimental value, particularly as her husband had died five years earlier. *BBC News, Eve Standard, Huffington Post, 16 Aug 2017.*

● In October 2011, a Swedish woman, Lena Paahlsson, found her wedding ring gracing a carrot 16 years after she lost it. She guessed it had fallen into the sink in 1995, and was thrown out with vegetable peelings for compost [**FT287:7**]. Children's author Nancy Bopp contacted her to say she was delighted that her 2002 book *The Gardener's Gold Ring* – which tells a very similar story – had come to life.

And in November 2016, an 82-year-old widower was reunited with his lost wedding ring after it turned up encircling a carrot dug from his garden. His wife had continually reassured him that the ring would turn up one day, but sadly she died six months prior to him finding it, ahead of the couple's 50th wedding anniversary. The unnamed man lost the ring three years earlier while gardening in his hometown of Bad Münstereifel, Germany. He was in high spirits after finding the ring, joking that you do indeed "reap what you sow". *[AP] 5 Nov; Huffington Post, 8 Nov 2016.*

● Chris Robb, 49, from St Albans, Hertfordshire, thought he had lost his white gold wedding ring while playing football with friends. He combed the pitch for 45 minutes and used a metal detector to try and locate it. A year later, in July 2017, his wife Annie, 50, spotted a long forgotten frozen takeaway meal. "We'd just sold our house, so I decided to clear out the freezer," she said. "There was a dodgy-looking curry in there, so I got it out. I was going to throw it away but I wanted to defrost it so there was no water in the bin." As the curry defrosted, she spotted the lost ring emerging. "You are kidding me," said her astonished husband. "How on earth did it get in the curry?" *D.Mail, Sun, 18 July 2017.*

● David Penner lost his wedding ring during a visit with his wife to Wyckoff's Tree Farm in White Township, New Jersey. He returned and searched, but the ring was nowhere to be found. About 15 years later, in April 2016, John Wyckoff, a third-generation tree farmer, was riding on the back of a tractor sticking Christmas trees in the ground when he spotted something shiny in the soil. It was the lost wedding band. An early December NJ.com report on the discovery spurred a call from Penner's sister-in-law, who connected the two men. The reunion was bittersweet for Penner, who lost his wife of 42 years when she died aged 67 three months earlier. *[AP] nj.com, ksl.com, 8 Dec 2016.*

● Ann Westland, 55, of Sunderland, lost her gold wedding ring in 1997 while digging around a tree in her back garden. She borrowed a metal detector from a friend, but the search proved fruitless. Almost 20 years later, in September 2016, her husband Ian spotted the ring among some snowdrop bulbs while he was gardening. "I noticed it on top of the soil, nowhere near where she had lost it," he said. *Northern Echo online, 19 Jan; Sun, 20 Jan 2017.*

● A couple who feared a wedding ring was lost forever owe their thanks to a baby living 20 miles away. Andy and Steph Freeman, who live on the outskirts of Norwich and married in 2015, had been hunting for the ring for months. Then they saw a community Facebook post from Cloey Jordan, in Wortwell, near Harleston, to whom they had given their old sofa two weeks before. She explained that her six-month-old son Kaleb had dropped his dummy down the back of the sofa and that when she dismantled the furniture to retrieve it she found Mr Freeman's ring. *BBC News, 17 Mar 2017.*

STRANGE CONTINENT

Colour your own Hitler and other European news

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A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

Pale ladies and haunted crossings

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A THORNY PROBLEM

Road builders versus Ireland's fairy trees

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THE CONSPIRASPHERE

As darkness falls at noon, at least in the United States, **NOEL ROONEY** looks online for terrifying signs and portents following in the path of totality...

A DANGEROUS 40 DAYS

Once upon a time our ancestors, primitive beings that they were, saw portents of evil in the sky; and a solar eclipse was among the darkest of them. A dragon was eating the Sun; the gods were expressing their anger by withholding the light of life; poison would contaminate any food cooked under the eclipse (although flowers planted under its baleful gaze would bloom with an unnatural brightness). Superstitions attached themselves to the phenomenon right up until relatively modern times: during the solar eclipse of 1818, visible across most of England, whole villages gathered in parish churches and prayed for redemption.

Then came the age of science, of scientism, a harsh spotlight that shattered the webs of myth and ignorance and shone the clean light of knowledge on the mysteries that clouded the minds of the ignorant; now we could see, and understand, that the strange dance of planets above us was nothing more than the turning of senseless gears in a firmament devoid of deity or purpose. The odd fact that our Moon was 400 times smaller than the Sun, but also 400 times closer to us (clearly a minor cosmic coincidence and not remotely significant), was evidence enough to dispel the miasma of superstition, and explain the nonetheless awe-inspiring spectacle that is a full solar eclipse.

Then science lurched on, like an endlessly productive juggernaut, and eventually invented, among other very fine things, the Internet. And lo! The acme of communications and collaborative thinking, the virtual world of ideas and shared wisdom, performed an ironic U-turn, dropped its ethereal trousers and mooned in the face of science, and rational thinking, and blew clouds of conceptual methane in the general direction of common sense.

So on 21 August, when a solar eclipse loomed once again over our apparently unsuperstitious skies, one that would be visible almost exclusively in the United States (a country where Intelligent Design is allowed equal space on the school curriculum with Darwin's theory of evolution), despite the valiant efforts of rationalists such as the great Neil deGrasse Tyson, the cogs that turned the quickest weren't those of the scientific cognoscenti. The avalanche of online doom-mongering that accompanied the American eclipse (can you hear the word 'apocalypse' when that phrase is spoken? You're not alone) would not have looked out of place inked onto fevered vellum in a mediæval scriptorium around the turn of the 10th century, or scratched in runes on antler fragments next to the remains of a slightly over-filled psilocybin prescription. Among my favourites was the nimble synaptic spacewalk performed by Michael Snyder, who manages by means of numerology to link the collision between a US Navy warship and an oil tanker, the eclipse, the illness of Senator John McCain, Yom Kippur, and the book of Revelation into a slam dunk End Times prophecy, a kind of Advent calendar for Nibiru watchers and overly bright-eyed alt-right I-told-you-so survivalists.

Under the god-like amusement of sceptical geographers of the Conspirasphere lies a sobering realisation that our engine of progress is not actually taking us anywhere: Fort was right. Every rational step 'forwards' is actually a blind bunny-hop into an ocean of nonsense; we reserve our amnesia for the realm of reason, and remember every daft notion onwards from the dawn of time.

www.prisonplanet.com/is-it-significant-that-the-uss-john-s-mccain-was-damaged-in-a-collision-on-the-same-day-as-the-solar-eclipse.html
http://theeconomiccollapseblog.com/archives/12-critical-events-that-are-going-to-happen-over-a-40-day-period-from-august-21st-to-september-30th
http://time.com/4909154/solar-eclipse-neil-degrasse-tyson/

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BID TO RE-CREATE UNIVERSE

(Dundee) Courier and Advertiser, 24 June 2016.

Mum forced to sell cottage after being terrorised by satanic goat

Daily Star, — Feb 2016.

WASHINGTON SCIENTIST LAUNCHES EFFORT TO DIGITISE ALL FISH

Associated Press, 27 July 2016.

Scientists claim Mars resembles Somerset

Daily News, 10 Aug 2016.

PLAYING THE BAGPIPES CAN BE FATAL

D.Telegraph, 23 Aug 2016.

SIDELINES...

TEACHER'S REVENANT

On 7 April a man in Chainat, Thailand, saw his neighbour in front of his house, looking pale and sad. He greeted him but got no reply. He later found out that the neighbour, retired maths teacher Narin Worapho, 62, had hanged himself from the banisters of his house at least 10 days earlier. *thaivisa.com, 10 April 2017*.

A LITTLE FRIGHT MUSIC

Police investigating reports of a ghost playing music at midnight inside a locked-up St Philip and St James church in Ilfracombe, Devon, called on the vicar to bring his keys and found organist Ian Lovegrave practising in the dark. *Sun, 9 July; Metro, 13 July 2017*.

HOTLINE TO HEAVEN

A Zimbabwean cleric has courted ridicule after telling his congregation (said to number 5,000) that he speaks to God on his cellphone. Pastor Paul Sanyangore, 32, of Victory World International Ministries, is shown on the church's website saying into his phone: "Hello, is this heaven?" He caused a stampede by handing out "anointed" condoms in church, and has promised to reveal God's phone number. *therealafrican.com, 18 May; Times, 24 May 2017*.

WOOLLY JUMPERS

More than 200 sheep died after they hurtled over a cliff in the Pyrenees on 23 July while being chased by a bear. The sheep belonged to a farmer on the French side of the border, but their bodies were found at the foot of a cliff just over the border in Spain. Bears were reintroduced to the region from Slovenia 20 years ago after disappearing in the early 1990s. *D.Telegraph, 23 July; Sydney Morning Herald, 25 July 2017.*

MARTIN ROSS

PHANTOM BARBERS

No woman's braids are safe as panic spreads

PARVEEN KUMAR / HINDUSTAN TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: A woman shows how her daughter's braids were chopped off near Ravi Nagar, Uttar Pradesh.

Reports of "phantom barbers" first emerged in June from the northern Indian state of Rajasthan. In subsequent weeks, close to 100 women in Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi reported that their hair had been chopped off while they were out cold. "I was in the kitchen and preparing dinner," said Sunita Devi, 53, from the Gurgaon district of Haryana, recalling the events of 28 July. "Suddenly, I realised that someone was standing at the main gate of my house. I went there and found a thin man in a red and yellow outfit, standing there with a trident in his hand. I asked him to go away." She returned inside and the man disappeared for a while but somehow entered her house. "There was a strong flash of light that left me unconscious," she said. "An hour later, I found that my hair had been chopped off. I am unable to sleep or concentrate on anything. I had read about such incidents taking place in Rajasthan, but never thought it would happen to me."

Sunita Devi lives in a close-knit community of traders and farmers. "I was alone on the ground floor of the house, and my daughter-in-law and grandson were upstairs when the attack happened at around 9:30pm," she says. They saw and heard nothing. Munesh Devi, a neighbour, said that the narrow lane, which has around 20 houses, is usually buzzing between 9pm and 10pm. "People get together after dinner to just talk and relax. Friday was no different, but none of us saw any unknown person going in or coming out of Sunita's house," she said.

> *"There was a strong flash of light that left me unconscious"*

Just a few yards away, Asha Devi lost her hair in a similar attack the following day, but this time the attacker was reportedly a woman. Her father-in-law, Suraj Pal, said that following the incident, he sent her and other women of his family to a relative's house in Uttar Pradesh for a few weeks. He was at home when Asha Devi went outside to complete a household chore at around 10pm. "I went outside to find her when she didn't return for more than 30 minutes," he said. "We found her unconscious in the bathroom. Her hair was chopped and thrown on the floor." Asha came to after an hour and told him that a woman dressed in black and carrying several knives had attacked her. "She told me that everything happened in less than 10 seconds," he said.

There were similar cases in rural areas of Rewari district – around 70km (43 miles) from Gurgaon. Reena Devi, 28, from Jonawasa village said she was attacked on 27 July. "I was doing my chores when I saw a large figure that resembled a cat. Then I felt somebody touching my shoulders, and that's the last thing I remember. I know it sounds impossible, but that's what I saw. Some people say I cut my hair, but why would I do that?" The same day, Reema Devi, 28, said her hair was chopped off while she was playing a game on her phone. "My husband and children were also in the room," she said. "I felt a pull on my hair and when I looked back, my hair was on the floor." [Reena Devi and Reema Devi, both 28 and both shorn on the same day? Have these reports been garbled?]

In the neighbouring village of Kharkharra, Sundar Devi, 60, had been bedridden since she was attacked and shorn on 29 July. "I was going to a neighbour's house when somebody tapped my shoulder from behind," she said. "When I looked back, there was nobody. That's the last thing I remember."

A cat also featured in another incident, reported by the *Times of India*. Sapna, 20, from the village of Devi Lal Nagar, claimed she was asleep beside her children when she saw a cat enter her room in the early hours. The cat transformed into a woman who pounced on her and cut her locks.

"These are bizarre cases," said Gurgaon police spokesperson Ravinder Kumar. "We have found no clues at crime scenes, medical tests of the victims show nothing abnormal. Only the victims say that they have seen or felt the presence of attackers. We will get to the bottom of these cases, but until then, I urge people to not believe in rumours."

Indeed, rumours were not in short supply. In one village, an elderly man said that an organised gang was involved. Another said he believed that 'tantriks', or witch doctors, were to blame. Others talked about a *choti wali daayan* (hair-snipping witch). Some feared that the hair could be used to cast spells. Others accused the victims of cutting their own hair to get attention. Rationalist Sanal Edamaruku insisted these cases were a classic example of "mass hysteria", but Reena Devi disagreed. "I spent years growing my hair and it made me happy," she said. "Now that it's gone, you can't even imagine my pain. It's ridiculous to say that women are chopping off their own hair."

In Agra city, Munni Devi said she went to sleep as usual, only to find her hair chopped off and her braid neatly placed near her pillow. Neither she nor her husband sleeping next to her had heard anything. At least 15 incidents of women's braids being mysteriously chopped off were reported from the villages of the Mewat region in the second half of July.

Delhi Police received three reports of mysterious hair-cutting within 12 hours near Dwarka. The first incident took place around 10am when Munish was lying in bed. "Munish came back home after giving fodder to the cattle. She complained of a headache to her daughter-in-law. While she was lying in her bed, her grandchild noticed her hair lying on the ground. Everybody at home panicked because no one saw anyone cut her locks," said Vimal Kumar from Chhawala. Then in the evening, Sridevi, in her mid-40s, came home after milking her cow, complaining of a headache. Her son spotted her hair on the ground. This took place a stone's throw from the location of the morning snipping. "These incidents are bizarre as no one could see the person cut women's hair locks," said Kumar. At 10:30pm, a woman claimed when she shut the doors of her house, she found her braid lying on the floor, scaring her.

The Deputy Commissioner of Police, Surinder Kumar, said these incidents shouldn't be looked at as witchcraft. "The team is checking the CCTVs installed in the area," he said. "In fact, in one of the CCTV footages, three men could be seen. We have developed their photographs. It might be possible that they are targeting people so that they could easily rob them. They will be arrested soon."

Some "miscreants" took advantage of the panic. Two brothers in Ambedkar Nagar confessed to cutting their sister's hair while she was sleeping. On 2 August in Mutnai, a village near Agra, around 125 miles (200km) north of Delhi, Mala Devi (or Mandevi), a 60-year-old low-caste woman, was lynched by a mob, which suspected her of being "a ghost who chopped off women's braids" after she lost her way and ended up in an upper-caste neighbourhood. Police immediately launched a manhunt for two brothers, named as Manish and Song. Yet another woman nearly met the same fate at the hands of a mob in Khair, Aligarh, but was rescued by the police. Anand Kumar, a top official in northern Uttar Pradesh state, said village committees had been ordered to quash rumours about ghosts or witches on hair-cutting rampages. The fact that nearly all officials quoted in the news reports are called Kumar is without significance… probably.

Several academics and commentators described the events as a case of mass hysteria, comparing them to the reports of "monkey man" attacks in India in 2001 and 2002 [**FT148:8-9, 149:7, 163:7, 164:6-7**]. Long-term readers will know that "phantom barbers" are a classic fortean phenomenon, exemplified by the pigtail snipping panic that swept China in 1876, described by Charles Fort in *Wild Talents* (1931). See "Hair today…" by Steve Moore [2003, **FT177:42-46**].

Hindustan Times , India Today, thehindubusinessline.com, 30 July; news18.com, 31 July; BBC News, 3 Aug; [AP] D.Telegraph, 4 Aug 2017.

SAUMYA KHANDELWAL / HINDUSTAN TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: People in New Delhi are hanging chillis and lemons outside their doors and making hand marks on walls for protection against the ghostly hair-snippers.

SIDELINES…

LIVING SHIPWORMS

Scientists have for the first time found live specimens of a giant worm-like creature, which can reach up to 5ft (1.5m) in length. A living shipworm had not been studied until the discovery of five beneath the sea in the Philippines. Despite the name, the creature is more closely related to clams and mussels. *D.Telegraph, 19 April 2017*.

TIMELESS

The Australian Research Council has awarded £531,186 of taxpayers' money to Associate Professor Kristie Miller – joint director of the University of Sydney's Centre for Time – to explore theories of time in physics and "our lived experience as agents". The ARC project summary states: "There is disagreement about the nature of time… and whether, in fact, it really exists at all." *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 10 June 2017*.

INSECT LODGERS

New Yorker Cherise Mulzac called in help after she saw honey dripping down her walls. A beekeeper found 35,000 bees in her ceiling, which he took back to hives. He harvested 70lb (32kg) of honey. *Metro, 14 July 2017*.

TURKEY DEVOLVES

Turkish children will no longer be taught about evolution at school. Alpaslan Durmus, the head of curriculum for the ministry of education, said that Darwin's theory was "controversial" and would be removed from lower school programmes by 2019. Under Recep Erdogan, Islamism is spreading through Turkey's once proudly secular state. *D.Telegraph, 24 June 2017*.

SERIAL CAT KILLERS

The small seaside resort of Saint Pierre la Mer, 90km (55 miles) south-west of Montpellier in southern France, was on edge after more than 200 cats, both pets and strays, were fatally poisoned inside a month. Rodents and birds also died, amid fears children might ingest the poison. Meanwhile in Cilgerran, Pembrokeshire, three cats had to put down after acute kidney failure – a sign of poison – and up to 17 other cats had vanished over the past few months. *BBC News, 6 June; D.Mirror, 1 July 2017*.

SIDELINES...

LEGEND LIVES

A crocodile is thought to be living in a suburban sewer in Australia's Northern Territory after a man spotted the predator attacking a wheelie bin outside his house in Palmerston, near Darwin. Police arrived to see the croc escaping down a street drainpipe. *Adelaide Advertiser, 25 Jan 2017*.

CROCODILE CHARMING

A 41-year-old man named Syarifuddin was bathing in a river in Berau, East Kalimantan, Indonesia, on 18 July when a 7ft (2m) crocodile snatched him and took him further into the river. The next morning, local villagers asked for help from a "crocodile charmer", who preformed a ritual, whereupon a crocodile appeared with Syarifuddin's body in its mouth, leaving it near the riverbank before being chased away. It is not known if the crocodile was the same as the one that had killed him. *BBC News, 21 July; [UNI] 24 July 2017*.

THE FINE OF THE BEAST

A man in Exeter, who threw his Jehovah's Witness wife's Bible in a garden burner last November, was fined £666. Jason Mortimore, 46, also hit Rachael with a magazine, as he feared she would cancel Christmas. *D.Mirror, 1 June 2017*.

RAVENOUS

Farmers across Britain have reported an alarming rise in ravens killing new-born lambs by pecking out their eyes and tongues. Such attacks are not unheard of because the birds are opportunistic feeders, but experts are baffled by the rise in lamb attacks. *Mail on Sunday, 14 May 2017*.

MARTIN ROSS

ASIAN ODDITIES

Fear and fainting, as well as a surprise reincarnation, in South East Asia

PRING SAMRANG / REUTERS

ABOVE: Khim Hang at home with the handsome calf she believes to be the reincarnation of her late husband.

HUSBAND RETURNS AS CALF

Cambodia's latest social media sensation is a five-month-old calf believed by a villager to be the reincarnation of her dead husband. Khim Hang, 74, said up to 100 people a day were visiting her home in northeast Kratie province to see the calf she said behaves in very similar ways to her husband, Tol Khut, who died more than a year ago. "I believe that the calf is my husband because whatever he does... is in exactly the same way as my husband did when he was alive," she said. "I will keep him and take care of him for my entire life."

The young cow was born in March and attracted a strong following on social media. "I thought it was quite unusual to see a cow go up to the house like this," said Thach Vin, 32, referring to a video she saw on Facebook in which the calf walked upstairs into the family's one-storey home. "So I came here to see it with my own eyes." When it is inside the wooden house, the calf is fed, washed and put to bed with a fluffy pillow once used by Tol Khut. *[R] 20 July 2017.*

CONTAGIOUS BEHAVIOUR

Around 35 workers fainted at the New Orient Garment Company in Canadia Industrial Park, Cambodia, on 7 August. "There was news spreading amongst the workers that one of them was possessed by a ghost spirit and was yelling for chicken to eat," said garment union leader Bun Van. "This information scared the other workers and they started to faint one by one. All of them were sent for treatment at a private clinic near the garment factory." Mr Van said it was not the first time such fears had spread amongst workers at the industrial park. "At some garment factories in Canadia Industrial Park it happened more than 10 times already," he said. "Some workers were brought to Takeo province to see Khmer magic sorcerers. In a few cases, owners of factories bought chickens to sacrifice at pagodas."

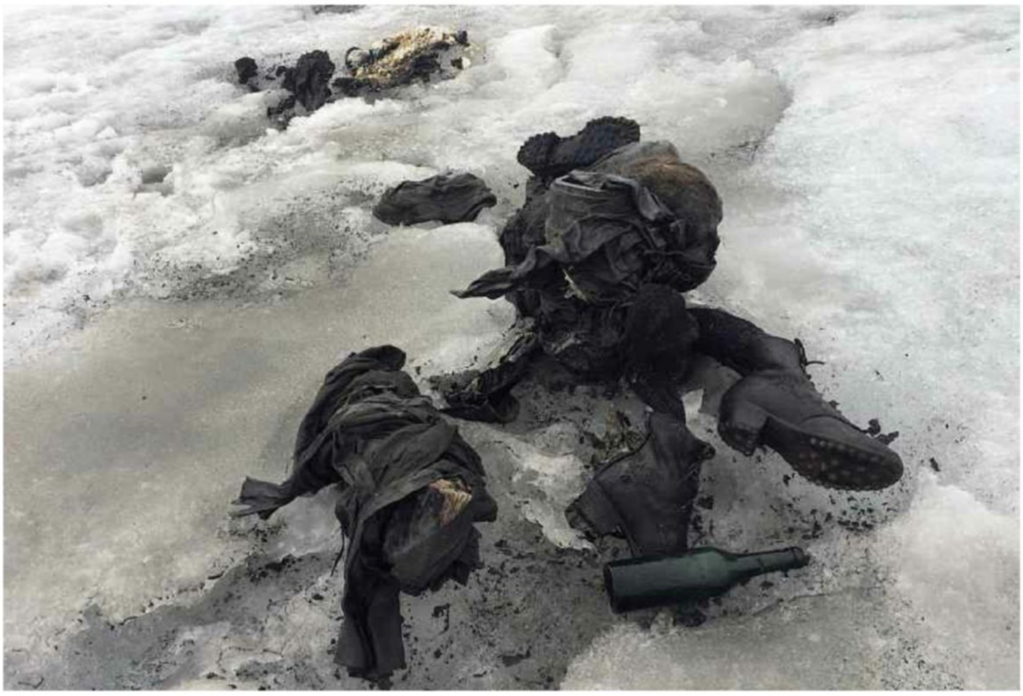
More than 1,000 workers are employed at the factory, which produces jacket, pants, dresses, skirts and polo shirts. Kim Ly, 35, one of those who fainted, said some workers fainted in the morning and others in the afternoon. "I felt panicked and suddenly I fainted, but I still do not clearly know the reason why," said Ms Ly. "Now, another worker who was brought for treatment at the clinic is still yelling like she is possessed." A month earlier, Cheav Bunrith, director at the Ministry of Labour's National Social Security Fund, said incidents of fainting in factories had decreased, from 1,800 in 2015 to 1,160 last year, thanks to education programmes on nutrition. *Khmer Times, 8 Aug 2017.*

- Meanwhile in Thailand, 16 schoolgirls experienced chest tightness, palpitations and fainting while being vaccinated against human papilloma virus (HPV) at Ban Krang School in Phitsanulok's Muang district. Nurse Jarunee Nasorn said 11 of the 16 students affected had yet to receive the vaccine. Her team had earlier vaccinated other students without any side effects or problems. Most of the students recovered after receiving first aid, but three were taken to hospital. One of the three was said to have suffered an asthma attack.

The government HPV vaccination project covers about 400,000 schoolgirls nationwide. The project is intended to prevent cervical cancer, the second most common cause of death by illness in Thai women. Thailand has about 6,000 new cases of cervical cancer reported each year and the death rate is about 3,000 a year. *The Nation (Thailand), 9 Aug 2017.*

BODIES ON ICE

Couple who went missing 75 years ago found by chance in thawing Swiss glacier



GLACIER 3000

In mid-July, a shrinking glacier in Switzerland revealed two frozen bodies believed to be of a couple who went missing 75 years ago. Marcelin and Francine Dumoulin, the parents of seven children, had gone to milk their cows in a meadow above Chandolin in the Valais canton on 15 August 1942. "We spent our whole lives looking for them, without stopping," said their youngest daughter, Marceline Udry-Dumoulin, 79. "We thought that we could give them the funeral they deserved one day." She said the news brought her a "deep sense of calm" and she wanted to give them the funeral they deserved. The bodies had identity papers, but DNA testing would be carried out to remove any doubt.

The bodies were discovered by a worker from Glacier 3000, a ski-lift company, on Tsanfleuron glacier, above the Les Diablerets resort, at an altitude of 2,615m (8,600ft). Director Bernhard Tschannen said his employee found some backpacks, tin bowls and a glass bottle, a book and a watch, as well as male and female shoes, and part of a body under the ice. He said that it was likely the couple had fallen into a crevasse.

TOP: Shoes and clothing are visible at the spot on a Swiss glacier where two bodies were found. **ABOVE:** Marcelin and Francine Dumoulin went missing in August 1942.

Marcelin Dumoulin, 40, was a shoemaker, while Francine, 37, was a teacher. They left five sons and two daughters. "It was the first time my mother went with him on such an excursion," said Udry-Dumoulin. "She was always pregnant and couldn't climb in the difficult conditions of a glacier. After a while, we children were separated and placed in families. I was lucky to stay with my aunt. We all lived in the region but became strangers. For the funeral, I won't wear black. I think that white would be more appropriate. It represents hope, which I never lost."

On 27 July, the remains of a person believed to have been killed in an Air India crash more than 50 years ago was also discovered in the French Alps, on Mount Blanc. Swiss police say hundreds of bodies of mountaineers who have gone missing in the Alps in the past century could emerge in coming years as global warming forces the country's glaciers to retreat. *[R] BBC News 18 July; D.Mail, 19 July; theguardian.com, 4 Aug* 2017.

SIDELINES...

FISH SWITCH SEX

A fifth of male river fish are now trans-gender because of chemicals being flushed down household drains – ingredients in the contraceptive pill, by-products of cleaning agents, plastics and cosmetics. Some are displaying feminised traits and even producing eggs. Others have reduced sperm quality and are not as aggressive, making them less likely to breed. *Sun, Metro, 3 July 2017*.

WELL ORDEAL

Jezdimir Milic left home in Serbia on 6 January to go shopping, but failed to come home. Neighbour Goran Markovic found him 52 hours later trapped down a 5m (16ft)-deep well while temperatures plunged to minus 20˚C (-4˚F). Markovic said Milic's poor eyesight probably explains why he fell into the well. He was rescued by firemen and treated for hypothermia and abrasions. *BBC News, 10 Jan 2017.*

ATM SOS

A repairman trapped inside a drive-thru ATM machine in Corpus Christi, Texas, on 12 July took almost three hours of shouting and passing "please help me" notes through the machine's receipt slot before he persuaded customers that it wasn't a joke and he really wanted to be let out. He had forgotten his key card and left his cellphone in his vehicle. *[R] BBC News, 13 July; D.Mail, 14 July 2017.*

MOUNTAIN MAN

When Nicholas Pentecost went for a walk in the Preseli Mountains in Pembrokeshire, he spotted a naked "feral" man near the summit of Carn Goedog. "He was looking at the ground and seemed slightly hunched," he said. "I couldn't hear if he was trying to talk to me or just making sounds." He didn't stick around to find out. *Sun, 3 June 2017*.

FIRST BLOOD

The world's oldest sample of mammal blood has been discovered in a tick preserved in amber for more than 30 million years. It is thought the parasite was picked off a monkey and landed in tree sap in what is now the Dominican Republic. *Sun, 6 April 2017*.

SIDELINES...

UNWISE REQUEST

Joseph Murphy, 20, of Bath Township, Ohio, telephoned the police to request K-9 unit's help. He told the dispatcher that his girlfriend had stolen his heroin, and that he need a police dog. Unsurprisingly, Murphy later faced criminal charges. *Fox13 (Sat Lake City), 27 April 2017*.

JAIL MONSTER

A prisoner has claimed to have seen the ghostly Beast of Parkhust Prison (now called HMP Isle of Wight). Lags say an "evil presence" lurks there. One, calling himself Joe King [sic], told the prison newspaper *Inside Time*: "One night, I looked out and saw a creature on the roof. It looked half man and half bat. It was eating pigeons. I'm still in shock." *Sun, 11 June 2017*.

FISH MYSTERY

Last June, Owen Wesner found six dead fish floating in a waterhole on his property in Walloon, near Ipswich in Queensland, Australia. The next day he visited his neighbour, and the pair found four dead eels in another waterhole on the neighbour's land. The day following, 10 dead fish were found floating in yet another neighbour's dam. It was a mystery as the three sites were some 300m (984ft) apart. *Ipswich Advertiser (Queensland), 7 June 2017*.

BALL COMES BACK

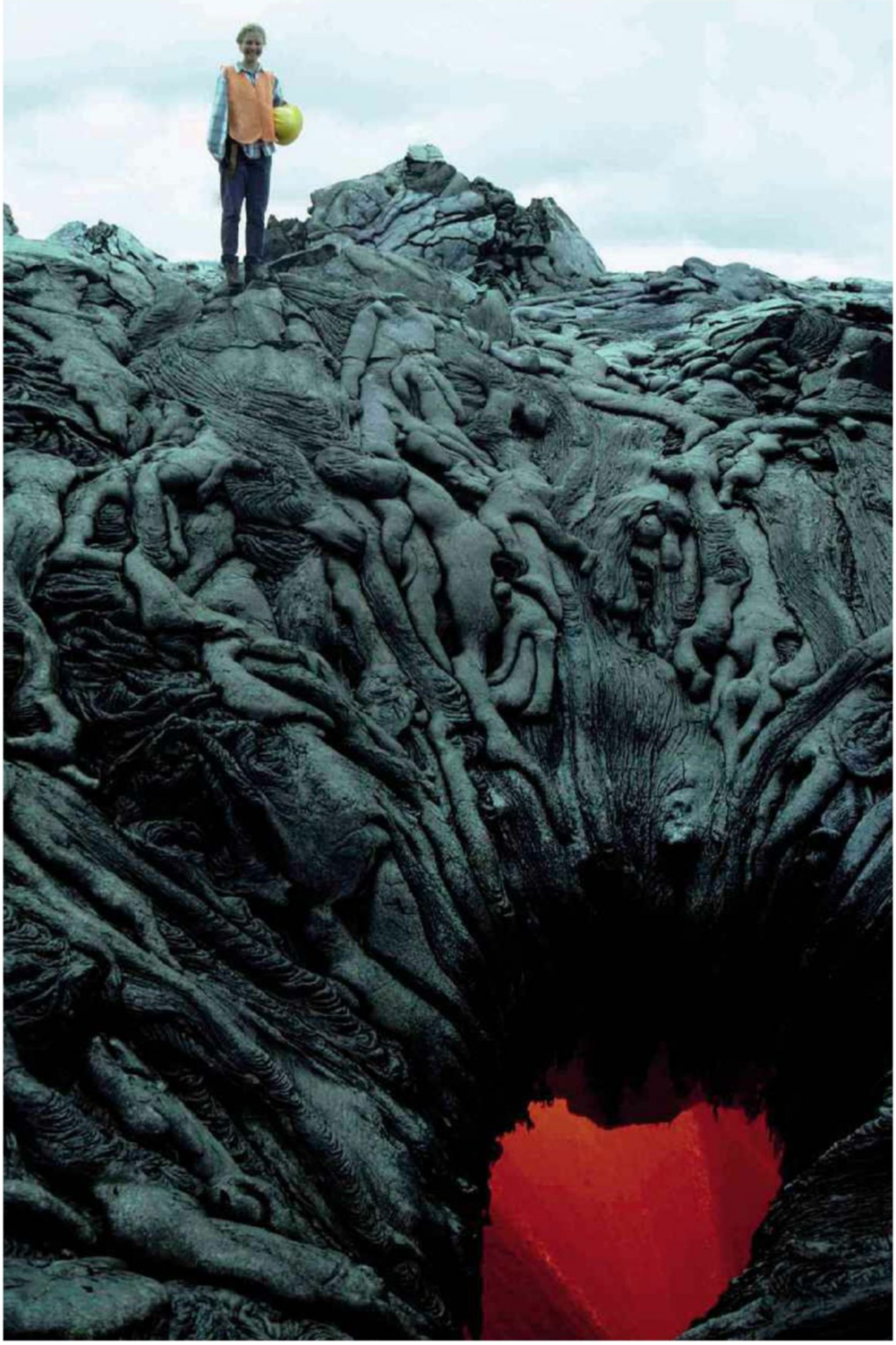
Golfer Elizabeth Picton found her lucky peach ball in a charity shop three years after a gull took it from St Andrews' West Sands course in Scotland. *Sun, 18 July 2017*.

LONG IN THE TOOTH

Student Urvil Patel, 18, discovered he had the world's longest recorded tooth after a dentist removed the 1.4in (3.6cm) fang in Vadodara, India. *D.Mirror, 14 July 2017*.

MARTIN ROSS

IT'S HELL ON EARTH... IN HAWAII!



This lava feature in Hawaii, known as the "West Kamokuna Skylight", was photographed by Laszlo Kestay for the US Geological Survey. According to the accompanying description, "Subsequent flows have fed lava into the skylight. A stationary crust is formed on margins of the flowing lava within the tube at this location, probably due to the loss of heat through the skylight... Lava tubes, by their nature, are buried. However, skylights form when the lava tube collapses in a specific area and allow one to see the flow inside the tube."

The image struck the Gang of Fort as a simulacrum of writhing bodies, reminiscent of Dante's vision of Hell (see **FT346:38-43**). *US Government Survey, accessed 8 Aug 2017*.

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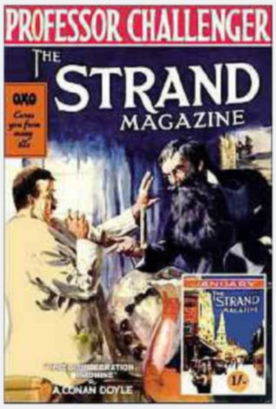
Teleportation and disintegration

DAVID HAMBLING isn't sure he wants his atoms scrambled in a quantum teleportation device

"Chinese scientists successfully teleported an object from the Earth's surface to an orbiting satellite for the first time ever," announced *USA Today* on 13 July. This implies that we will soon be beaming ourselves around the planet, and that flying robot taxis will become as quaint as ox carts. Teleportation has crossed from outlandish fantasy to scientific acceptance, but we should not give up on other modes of transport just yet. There are still a few details to be resolved.

Charles Fort coined the term teleportation in 1931, referring to a cosmic force that moved people, animals and objects to strange places. This included the appearance of Kaspar Hauser and the (then) strange disappearance of the crew of the *Mary Celeste*, as well as out-of-place animals and falls of fish and frogs. Fort did not originate the idea though; a spiritual medium's standard trick was an 'apport' in which an object seemingly appeared out of nowhere. Generally it was an object small enough to be secreted about the medium's person. (See also "The teleport before Fort" by Theo Paijmans, **FT355:30-31**).



In 1929 Arthur Conan Doyle wrote a short story featuring Professor Challenger, called 'The Disintegration Machine'. A Latvian scientist has invented a device which can dissolve things into their constituent particles, then re-assemble them perfectly, a process which he describes as the scientific version of apport. Challenger goes through the process of disintegration and reintegration himself, but when the Latvian plans to sell the disintegrator to a foreign power as a weapon, Challenger disintegrates the man, leaving him permanently in limbo.

The current work is based on quantum entanglement of photons, a phenomenon about which Einstein was deeply sceptical, dismissing it as 'spooky action at a distance'. When photons are entangled, a change to one is reflected in the other, however far apart they may be. If a third photon interacts with one of the pair, information it carries may be transmitted to the distant, entangled photon. First proposed in 1993, it was dubbed 'quantum teleportation' because of the transfer between two points without transiting through the intervening distance.

Since then, scientists around the world have carried out experiments proving that, whatever Einstein thought, quantum teleportation works in practice. The latest Chinese achievement is part of their Quantum Experiments at Space Scale (QUESS) programme involving a special satellite. It is actually easier to send photons through space than transmitting them around on Earth. When an entangled photon interacts with a particle within a fibre-optic cable or the air, it may be nudged and lose its entanglement, limiting transmission to a few hundred kilometres. Space offers no such resistance.

Quantum teleportation transfers information rather than matter. When *USA Today* said the Chinese had teleported an 'object', they really meant that a photon had been teleported. Or rather, a copy of the photon was created in orbit while the original was destroyed in the process.

The accomplishment may be important for secure communications. A teleported photon cannot be intercepted or tapped, so it guarantees complete security that cannot be cracked even in theory. This technology may one day send ultra-secure passwords and other vital data over secure channels.

Things get trickier if we want to send objects rather than sub-atomic particles. In theory, it would be possible to analyse a human body atom-by-atom – disintegrating it in the process – and then send the data to a remote location, where it could be recreated perfectly. As with Conan Doyle's disintegration machine, "There is an invisible framework and every brick flies into its true place."

The volume of data involved would be mind-boggling. QUESS handles four thousand photons a second, a human body contains around seven billion billion billion atoms. The data for that many atoms will occupy an even larger number of bytes – millions of times greater than the total data storage capacity of every device on the planet. Even if communication were accelerated to an almost unthinkable rate, the data for one person would take geological periods of time to send.

And when the data does arrive, we do not have the technology to assemble items atom by atom in this way, nor much idea of how it could be done.

Even if the technology could be mastered, there is a more fundamental objection. This type of teleportation is not sending a person anywhere. It is disintegrating them and creating a copy somewhere else. The original you will be turned to dust, and an impostor who looks like you and has your memories will have taken your place. They in turn will be disintegrated when they step into the teleporter for the 'journey' back.

Even if the process could be modified so that the original atoms are transmitted to the remote teleporter terminal, it still raises awkward questions. Tearing someone apart into atoms kills them, and whether a copy is made from the original atoms or a different set, can they still be said to be the same person? Professor Challenger's sidekick is horrified when the Latvian is vaporised; the man certainly appears to be dead, even though in theory he could be restored at some later time.

The problem is particularly knotty because the question of identity is a philosophical and legal one that cannot be resolved by science. I am not physically identical to the person I was yesterday, but the continuity makes me think I still have the same identity. A duplicate might think he was me, but he lacks that continuity. It is not easy to tell how you could ever prove identity, or the lack of it.

The issue gets even more interesting if you have a more advanced 'teleporter' that doesn't have to destroy the original but simply makes a remote copy. This would lead to legions of imposters – unless the teleporter is designed to disintegrate the original, purely to stop this sort of dispute from happening.

I suspect many people, even those who are not religious and who would not ask where the soul goes during teleportation, might be cautious about embracing this exciting new technology. We will stick to old-fashioned flying robot taxis.

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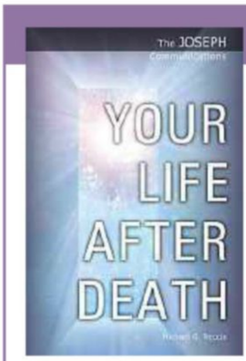

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IN CASSANDRA: AND THEY ALL FALL DOWN by Julie Hodgson, Cassandra Jones has violently beaten Braydon Taylor, a six-year-old. But that was 10 years ago. Now Dr. Sommer has taken her off her meds. As a 16-year-old, Cass enjoys hanging out at iCandy, an ice cream joint, with her best friends, Bindi and Leo. She attends Garden City High and loves learning Shakespearean plays from the handsome Mr. Mac. She's also in love with the town's newest resident: Braydon Taylor. But when she's alone, Cass battles incessant hand itching and hallucinations of creepy tentacles wiggling out of her skin. A compulsive need to run to remote locales places her at the center of an epidemic of dead teenagers being found at Jenson's Park. Will her alibi clear her of any wrongdoing or is there a serial killer loose in Garden City?

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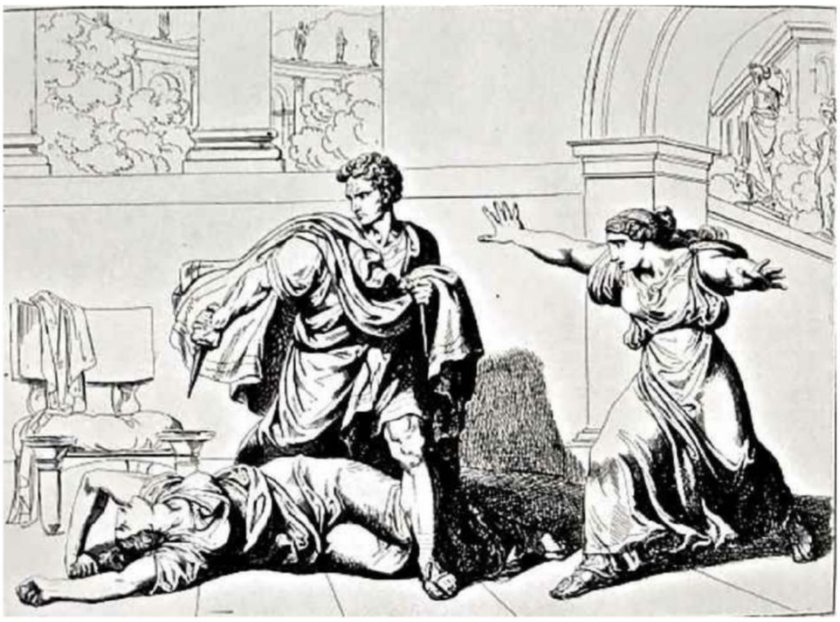
FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

216: MURDER MOST FOUL



ABOVE: Octavius Saggita murders Pontia. **OPPOSITE:** Poppæa Sabina.

"A plebeian tribune, Octavius Sagitta, was besotted with Pontia, a married woman, bribing her into an adulterous affair, then into leaving her husband. He promised to marry her, to which she said Yes. But, after divorcing, she started to prevaricate, alleging her father's opposition to the match, before snaring a richer suitor and reneging on her promise.

"Octavius raged between recriminations and threats: his money was gone, his reputation ruined, his life – all he had left, he said – was in her hands. Despite continual rejections, he begged for one last night with her, which he swore would be a permanent memory and consolation.

"Pontia gave way, set a date, and arranged for a trusted maid to keep watch. Octavius arrived, accompanied just by one freedman, with a concealed dagger. As usual when love and anger combine, there were outbursts and tears, reproaches and affection, then love-making. After which, when Pontia was relaxed, Octavius, like a madman, stabbed her to death. When the maid tried to intervene, he slashed her face and fled the bedroom.

"The murder was discovered the next day. There was no doubt about Octavius having spent the night with her. However, the freedman maintained he was the guilty one, avenging the wrong done to his patron. A number of people were convinced by this loyal gesture, until the maid, her wound now healed, with her evidence revealed the truth.

Octavius was arraigned by Pontia's father before the consuls and, after resigning his tribunate, was condemned by a senatorial hearing under the prescribed laws governing murder."

So Tacitus (*Annals*, bk13 ch44), apropos the year AD 58. Elsewhere (*Histories*, bk4 ch 44), apart from seeing the lady's full name – Pontia Postuma – we learn that Octavius, having escaped from the island to which he had been exiled, tried and failed to profit from a general amnesty proposed in AD 70 by Domitian, thanks to the eloquent opposition of his father Vespasian's right-hand man, Mucianus (see **FT222:15** for his book of forteana).

In neither account does Tacitus add to our knowledge of Octavius Sagitta – rather pointedly, his cognomen means 'arrow' – who remains an unknown quantity to us and, unless he did not care or thought his readers would not, perhaps to Tacitus also. 'Perhaps', because an Octavius Sagitta is commemorated in an inscription (CIL 9. 3311) from the Pælignian district of Italy. Not our man, but one tribe in this area was the Marsi, amongst whom was a branch of the Octavius family related to Nerva, the first of Gibbon's 'Five Good Emperors', one eulogised by Tacitus.

Maybe, then Tacitus was trying to airbrush Octavius Sagitta out of history. Why mention him at all, then? Because the episode was headline news at the time. The poet Lucan was inspired to compose a pair of rhetorical exercises setting our prosecution and defence speeches. When Tacitus was writing, these were available to the Roman reading public.

When Pontia was relaxed, Octavius, like a madman, stabbed her to death

Lucan, incidentally, after being implicated in a plot to assassinate Nero, having tried to save himself by denouncing his innocent mother, did the 'Roman thing' of opening his veins in a hot bath, his twist being to expire reciting his own verses – The Song Never Dies, Just The Singer.

An even more exotic suicide was that of – wait for it – the (black) widow Pontia who (Scholiast on Juvenal 6. 638), condemned for multiple filicide, after a hearty last supper danced herself to death, saltation being her favourite hobby – would that John Travolta had followed this example of Pontia's pilates.

For a literary analysis of Tacitus's crime reporting, cf. my article in *Acta Classica* 42, 1999, 15-22; also Rebecca Langlands, *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome*, 2006, pp336-8, who sees it as a construct based on ancient accounts of what we – thanks to Shakespeare – call 'The Rape of Lucrece'. In similar vein, Ronald Syme, greatest of modern Taciteans, opining (*Tacitus,* 1958, p543) that "sex was not among the historian's main preoccupations," declared the Octavius-Pontia affair was stuck in as a curtainraiser to his introduction of a more potent *femme fatale*, Poppæa Sabina, who glided via her beauty and seductive charms from wife of future emperor Otho to wife of present one Nero.

Most people are drawn to sex and violence, even if guiltily, and those who deem Roman men too dour and stiff upper-lip might even rejoice at this evidence. This was a story worth telling for its own sake, not just as exordium to Poppæa, and that is why Tacitus tells it.

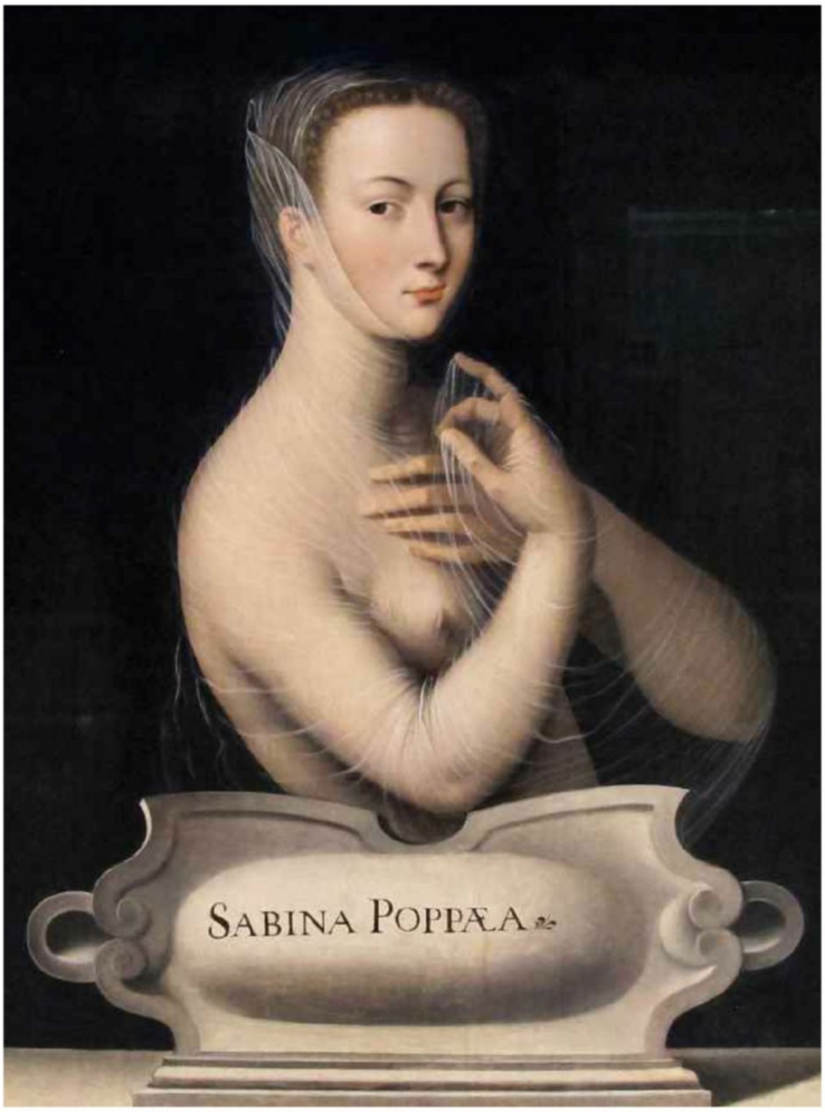
Most telling against Syme and Langlands, it is not a 'one-off'. Exotic and passionate men and women stalk the *Annals* and *Histories* (full catalogue in my 'Women in Tacitus,' *Prudentia* 4, 1972, 83-101. A prætor, Plautius Silvanus, "for unknown reasons", flung his wife out of their bedroom window, claiming he'd done it while sleep-walking, hence had no memory of it – sounds very *Midsomer Murders*. Emperor Tiberius inspected the room, found signs of resistance and pushing, ordered Silvanus to trial – he anticipated the verdict by a veins-in-bath departure. An attempt to save his reputation by claiming ex-wife Numantina had driven him mad by sorcery was foiled by her acquittal.

The wife of a general, Calvisius Sabinus, unnamed by Tacitus (it was Cornelia) "had an unfortunate passion for inspecting the camp-site. One night she broke in, disguised as a soldier, brazenly forced herself upon the sentries and others, finally having the nerve to commit adultery in – of all places – the officers' mess."

Sounds like something from a Simon Raven novel, also recalling wartime tales of teenage girls hanging around American army camps. Cornelia sounds like a squaddie-groupie (Juvenal's Sixth Satire lambastes aristocratic ladies with a weakness for gladiators). But her target was a big fish, Titus Vinius, destined for greatness under Galba, death under Otho. Cornelia herself, along with hubby, was forced to suicide on treason charges.

During skirmishes with some German tribes (AD 70), a Roman flagship was captured, its crew in both senses all at sea because their commander had nipped on-shore for a night of rumpy-pumpy with a willing local lass called Claudia Sacrata. He sounds like the captain of an Italian cruise ship, but was in fact Petilius Cerealis, one of Vespasian's crack-officers, appointed a year later to govern Britain where he'd previously been smashed in battle by Boudicca (aka Boadicea – allegedly buried between platforms 9 and 10 at King's Cross station, putting her under the wheels of the Hogwarts Express).

Tacitus's *Histories* aggravatingly break off at this point, hence also this tale of military dereliction. The description by his modern biographer Philip Matyszak (*Imperial General: The Remarkable Career of Petilius Cerealis*, 2012) as a cross between Blackadder and Flashman is attractive but (alas) overblown.



We'd like to know more about the lady Vistilia who (AD 19) officially registered herself as a prostitute – short of cash? Short of sex? This led to her swift exiling to Seriphos, a dull place, famous only for the failure of its frogs to croak (Aelian, *On Animals*, bk3 ch37), and a raft of emergency laws designed to curb female lust.

How Vistilia would have fared in the Rome of AD 69, when prostitutes plied their trade amid the carnage of civil war street fighting while crowds cheered as though at the arena is a matter for conjecture, more so than would be an eye-witness report from 'Lord Porn' Longford.

Back to Octavius Sagitta – time to return to the straight and arrow. Tacitus, writing a generation later, leaves some loose ends. How many maids of Pontia were there? In Michael Grant's Penguin translation, we first have one privy to the assignation, then "a maid" rushes in after the stabbing, thus implying a second one. As often, such ambiguity is the result of Latin lacking definite and indefinite articles.

What about the ex-slave? Surely not present in the boudoir as a voyeur? So, when might he have accomplished the deed? Did Octavius storm out after a post-cœtal quarrel, thus provoking his companion to rush in and stab the lady? But then he would presumably have to be the one who wounded the maid. Perhaps it all happened in the dark and she only assumed Octavius to be her attacker?

At all events, some Romans believed his story, and the judges must have had the seeds of doubt planted in their minds – here is where a Falco might come in...

"This woman had been killed inexplicably, in commonplace terms, and that later, means were taken, but awkwardly, or almost blindly, and only by way of increasing the mystery, to make the murder seem understandable in terms of common human experience" – Fort, *Books*, p696

STRANGE CONTINENT

Unfazed by Brexit, **ULRICH MAGIN** and **THEO PAIJMANS** round up the weirdest news from across Europe...

FEUERWEHR WITTEN

ABOVE: The boa constrictor discovered near a playground in Witten an der Ruhr found a temporary home at the fire station.

OUT-OF-PLACE ANIMALS

The hot summer in Europe saw more than the usual number of exotic creatures appearing. A North American snapping turtle 25cm (10in) long and weighing 5kg (11lb) was rescued by Monique Schiller near the harbour of Bregenz on the Austrian side of Lake Constance. She found the animal in the grass close to a cycle path. (*Vorarlberger Nachrichten*, 11 July 2017). On 11 July, an iguana was spotted on a forest path at Agatharied in Bavaria and rescued by a team of fire-fighters. It was identified as an Australian Pogona or bearded dragon and brought to an animal shelter. (*Merkur*, Munich, 11 July 2017).

Now for snakes: A leopard-spotted snake, more than 2m (6.5ft) in length, tried to enter a car at Elche in Valencia, Spain, and was removed and returned "to its natural habitat" by police officers. (*ABC*, Madrid, 13 June 2017). A boa constrictor, this time 1.5m (5ft) in length, was found in a forest at Arogno, Canton Ticino, Switzerland. The animal was motionless and appeared dead, but came back to life in an animal shelter. (*Provincia di Como*, 14 June 2017). In Germany, another 2m (6.5ft) female boa constrictor was discovered close to a playground at Witten an der Ruhr on 30 June. The snake was taken by firefighters to the local firestation, where she slept in a large bin before being handed over to a snake expert. (*Westfälischer Anzeiger*, 2 July 2017). In the morning of 20 July 2017, workers cleaning a house in Düsseldorf's Lichtenbroich area opened a wooden box in the garden when a snake tried to escape. They called the firefighters, who caught a 1m (3ft) royal python. The animal was taken to the zoo at Brüggen. (*RP Online*, 20 July 2017). Then, firefighters from Melk, Lower Austria, caught a "long snake" on the grounds of the local football club in mid-July. The animal was returned to the floodplain forest of the Danube. (*Niederösterreichische Nachrichten*, 22 July 2017). Police officers removed a long, black, red, and yellow-striped "domestic serpent" over 1m long from a house in Elda, Alicante, Spain. It had crept in through an open window. (*ABC*, Madrid, 22 July 2017).

In July, residents of the city of Middelburg in the Netherlands were also hunting for a large snake. A picture was taken of the 2m-long, green-yellow creature, but the photo was too fuzzy to identify what kind of snake it was and whether or not it was poisonous. A search by local police was unsuccessful. (*Hart van Nederland*, 28 July 2017). About a month before, alerted by a terrible smell, a hiker discovered a dead Indian python in a ditch near a railroad track in the Dutch city of Oosterbeek. The cadaver was 4.7m (15ft) long. According to an employee of the animal rescue service, the snake was "big enough to strangle a person". Police said they had no idea where the snake had come from. (*De Gelderlander*, 23 June 2017).

Also in July, Egyptian vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*) made a comeback in Italy, where they were believed to be extinct. They were spotted and photographed or filmed on several occasions in Caserta. (*Il Quaderno*, 5 July 2017; *Corriere del Mezzogiorno*, 6 July 2017).

WEIRD CRIME

In October 2016, a couple from the small town of Datteln in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, dressed up as clowns, and ran around the streets causing mayhem with the local traffic as cars swerved to avoid them. The pair were arrested and put on trial for dangerous disruption of traffic in Recklinghausen in June 2017. The 35-year-old woman was sentenced to six months probation, her 29-year-old partner given a 1,000 Euro fine. It was the first "evil clown" trial in Germany. (*Die Rheinpfalz*, 10 June 2017).

On 7 April 2017, an eight-year-old girl stopped people in the streets of Kaiserslautern, Germany, telling them her friend had been grabbed and kidnapped by an unidentified older man. She had seen the man dragging her friend into a car, which then drove off. Police searched the area for the car; however, after further enquiries, they found the allegedly missing friend at home with her parents. After an "intense examination" the girl admitted she had invented the crime. (*Rheinpfalz am Sonntag*, 9 April 2017).

MYSTERY SOUNDS

The mysterious whistling sound that annoyed residents of St Augustin-Menden, near Bonn, Germany, early in June was soon identified by police as coming from a machine that drained moisture from a flat. (*Radio Rhein-Sieg*, 8 & 9 June 2017). However, other noises have plagued towns and cities in the region for years. For example, a humming and whistling low frequency noise "tormented" 70-year-old Friedrich Kautz in the Cologne quarter of Bickendorf. It was just bearable in the daytime, but got worse at night. He said he felt vibrations and heard sounds like a car motor running, and blamed a transformer in a neighbouring room. He was not alone, though: mysterious sounds were heard in the southern centre ("a monotonous droning noise") and in Cologne-Dellbrück ("high pitched, easily audible whistling tone") but their source remained unidentified. (*Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 2 August 2016). The prime suspect was a new tram line – number 17 – which runs along all the roads where unidentified sounds had been reported by 19 sufferers. Residents had established a map showing locations, and the Cologne department for the environment promised to check. (*Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 25 Feb + 2 Mar 2016). The hum, though, had been reported previously in 2014 and 2005. (*ka-news.de*, 1 Apr 2014; *Kölnische Rundschau*, 1 Apr 2005).

For years, a mysterious humming noise has kept residents of the city of Zutphen in the Netherlands awake at night. Its cause is still a mystery, despite hundreds of reports, the foundation of a pressure group in 2014 (it disbanded last July) and a number of official investigations. The sound, especially audible at night, is described as a "low frequency, machinelike sound, as if coming from many ventilators all working at the same time". The municipality took the complaints very seriously and two investigations were conducted, a spokesperson stated. (*De Telegraaf*, 5 July 2017).

...AND SMELLS

A terrible stench was reported in a part of Tongelre, a neighbourhood in the city of Eindhoven, the Netherlands, and kept emergency services busy. Residents complained about a 'chemical smell'. The source was traced to a bucket in a garden, which contained a dead skunk. The man in whose garden the dead animal was found claimed that the skunk attacked him repeatedly and sprayed him. He had managed to fend the creature off and kill it. Firemen had to be called in to combat the stench, which was so severe that police and firemen developed headaches and burning eyes. They later returned in special suits to spray the garden with chlorine. Where the skunk came from remains a mystery. (*Algemeen Dagblad*, 7 July 2017).

STRANGE BEHAVIOUR

On 3 July, a passer-by called police to report a strange man dancing around a tree and singing in Steinen, Baden-Württemberg, Germany. Officers arrived and found the man was not mad, but merely performing his martial arts and relaxation techniques. He usually practised in a forest, he explained, but was waiting for a doctor's appointment and decided to put the time to good use. (*Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung*, 4 July 2017).

Less harmless was the man who posed as police officer in Thurow near Neustrelitz. He rang the doorbell, presented an ID card, and began questioning a woman in her house. She thought the ID card looked suspicious and later reported this to the police, who found it couldn't have been one of theirs. The motive of the false policeman was not clear at the time of reporting. (*Nordkurier*, Neubrandenburg, 9 July 2017).

HITLER IN HOLLAND

A grocery chain in the Netherlands has taken a colouring book for children off its shelves after customers alerted the store that it contained a picture depicting Adolf Hitler, including a swastika. A spokesperson for the company stated that the book had been in stores for only half a day and that perhaps a few dozen had been sold. It had taken the book off the shelves as it deemed the picture of Hitler "inappropriate". The Belgian publisher of the book said it was a "regrettable mistake", and explained that the book had been produced in India. "I suspect the person who created the colouring pictures took a book about famous persons and chose a few, amongst whom unfortunately was Adolf Hitler. Maybe he didn't know who he was." (*De Telegraaf*, *Het Parool*, *NRC Handelsblad*, 5 Apr 2017).

ALEXANDER SCHIPPERS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Kira Vervloed with the colouring book she bought at a Dutch store.

MYSTERY CONDITION

In Sweden, hundreds of children of refugees have fallen into a comatose state after hearing that their families will be expelled from the country. The syndrome, said to exist only in Sweden, has been named 'Uppgivenhetssyndrom' or resignation syndrome. A doctor said that the children have no illness or neurological disorder, but seem to have lost the will to live. The Swedes also refer to these children as 'de apatiska', the apathetic. Almost all patients are aged between eight and 15 years and are from the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Often the children are from Roma or Uyghur families. (*7S7*, *Express. live*, 30 Mar 2017).

DELAYED MAIL

33 years after it had been posted in France, a postcard was finally delivered to the address of René and Miranda Damhuis in the town of Glanerburg, the Netherlands. The postcard was addressed to the mother of René Damhuis, who had passed away in 2006. In the meantime, Damhuis had moved from that address, but the mailman knew where to track him down since Damhuis still lives in the small town. His brother Eduard, who was taking a holiday near Lake Annecy in France, had sent the postcard in 1984. A spokesperson for the Dutch postal services had no idea why it took so long for the postcard to arrive. "On average, it occurs once a year that a letter or postcard spends a number of years in the system, but 33 years is indeed a very long time." (*De Telegraaf*, 19 July 2017).

White ladies and haunted bridges

ALAN MURDIE ponders the ubiquity of White Lady ghosts and their attraction to river crossings

ABOVE LEFT: Campo Viero's Yaza bridge. **ABOVE RIGHT**: A photo allegedly showing the ghostly woman said to haunt the bridge and cause accidents.

Crossing a bridge at the right time can prove a wonderful, liberating experience, conveying sensations of expectation, escape or freedom. For the poet Wordsworth passing over Westminster Bridge in 1802 it proved revelatory, granting him a mystical vision of London (*Upon Westminster Bridge*). But for those traversing a bridge near the town of Campo Viera, in the far northeastern corner of Argentina, the experience is increasingly one of terror. Locals insist that the bridge spanning a stream known as 'the Yaza', along National Highway 14, is the scene of numerous encounters between motorists and a ghostly woman in white who causes traffic accidents. Her apparition materialises on the road ahead of drivers, just as they come on to the bridge, causing them to swerve into the bridge or collide with other vehicles.

Sightings of the ghost are being logged officially. In 2013, a truck driver told police that he had run into a woman crossing the bridge – but when officers reached the scene there was no signs of a victim or any accident. A short while after, an engineer from Zona Centro claimed a similar experience, whilst in 2016 two different motorists reported separate sightings on the same day. All drivers concerned were badly shaken, convinced they had run down a real woman who had suddenly crossed in front of their vehicles.

The bridge is become notorious as an accident black spot that has claimed at least three lives in the last six years. Fatal crashes on the bridge occurred in 2011 and 2012. The first was when a lorry crossing the bridge collided with a car killing its occupants Ruben Omar Antoneta (39) and Humberto César De Olivera (44). In October 2012 a policeman, Juan Zurakowski (25), died after his car hit the guardrail over the bridge. There have also been a number of other non-fatal collisions and lucky escapes, the most recent accident being on 15 March 2017 when a Mercedes-Benz truck loaded with seven tonnes of tobacco veered off the road and plunged into the stream, though miraculously the driver and two colleagues were unharmed. The police declared that the cause of this accident was a faulty steering wheel (or brake failure), but locals are blaming the ghost.

The ghostly woman materialises ahead of drivers just as they come onto the bridge

Fears concerning the area intensified two months later with the mysterious death of an 18-year-old man who went missing on 18 May, having suddenly left home without telling his family where he was going. After a week of extensive searches his body was found on the riverbank near the bridge. Since there was no obvious cause of death nor signs of any injury on his body, an autopsy was ordered. Whatever its verdict, it is unlikely to quell the popular apprehension concerning the bridge. Even residents who refuse to believe in the ghost now speak of the 'Curse of the Yaza'.

Local inhabitants point to the history of the bridge, which was constructed during the military dictatorship that ruled Argentina between 1976-83. The regime committed numerous human rights abuses, and it is claimed that the bodies of dissidents killed in the period were dumped from the bridge, or even buried in the concrete used to build it. The lady in white is believed by some to be the spirit of a political activist who helped the peasantry and was murdered; another story holds her to be a local schoolteacher who became pregnant out of wedlock and committed suicide. (*Sources Misiones Online http://misionesonline.net/2017/03/21/misiones-aseguran-fantasma-una-mujer-provoca-accidentes-automovilisticos-puente/ 16+21 Mar 2017*).

Of course, bridges, like all crossing places over bodies of water, can be treacherous, and especially when situated above large bodies of water with fast flowing currents. Aside from the peril associated with falling into water, crossing an isolated bridge in the countryside at night a may prove an unsettling experience as routes of escape are curtailed if any threat or danger is encountered. The literature of psychoanalysis recognises in neurotic cases a specific fear of bridges: *gephyrophobia* (from the Greek *gephyra* for bridge). Worldwide, certain bridges possess an attraction for suicides.

Folklorists and mythographers interested in the physical locations that attract ghost stories will recognise a bridge as a liminal point, connecting two places, yet being in neither. With all bridges, travellers who cross are temporarily between two localities, symbolic of being in a transient state. Rivers or seas long featured in mythology to illustrate the separation of the living from the dead, and those who attempt crossing over them may find their immortal souls imperilled. Such mythical bridges are often the point that distinguishes between the righteous and the damned and the fate of the soul determined.

The stories of deaths on the Yaza river may evoke even more primitive beliefs concerning rivers and bridges that demand periodic sacrifices. British folklore contains examples such as the River Dart in Devon recorded in verse:

‘Dart, Dart, Cruel Dart,
Every year thou claimest a heart.’

Similar traditions attach to the Ribble river in Lancashire where ‘Peg O’Nell’, a fearsome spirit, is blamed for drownings (see ‘Death by Rivers and Sacrifice’ (1998) by Jeremy Harte: www.whitedragon.org.uk/articles/rivers.htm). Oral historian George Ewart Evans believed that stories were the faint echo of archaic human sacrifices in the remote past. (See *Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay,* 1956).

However, as Argentine commentators point out, popular myths and folklore do not make complaints to the authorities. Simply identifying a bridge as a liminal place in folklore or a physically dangerous location fails to explain just why sightings of apparitions should be occurring in the 21st century. Reports are apparently coming from actual witnesses, a number of whom appear to have been strangers to the neighbourhood, convinced that their spontaneous experiences are real.

Rather than viewing the bridge as being of central importance, in my opinion, the more significant element is what is being seen, namely the apparition of a woman in white who walks in front of a traveller or visitor. Reading these accounts from Argentine media sources, I was at once reminded of the discussion of White Lady ghosts published by the Jungian psychologist Aniela Jaffe in her book *Apparitions* (1963). Her work focused upon a collection of testimony originally gathered through public appeals in 1953-54 by a Swiss newspaper asking readers to send in personal uncanny experiences. Like many such popular appeals, it drew in a wealth of material – some 1,200 letters. One of the categories immediately discernible in accounts was apparitions fitting the traditional ‘White Lady’ motif. For instance, a female correspondent in her sixties wrote of a childhood encounter, circa 1900, on the bridge at Ames in Switzerland with the figure of a woman “not very tall and snow-white. She floated along in front of me… I could not see her face; the figure was wrapped from top to toe in a very fine veil.”

Examining accounts from a Jungian standpoint, Jaffe found such apparitions to be ubiquitous and highly impersonal in nature, viewing them as archetypal forms present within the unconscious mind. They were also consistent with traditional stories of such ghosts from European and North American folklore. Usually there is a tragic story or legend of violence, betrayal or ill treatment inflicted in the past upon a woman or her children.

ABOVE: The Brownville Road Bridge outside Millinocket, Maine, is said to be haunted by “the Lady of Millinocket”, a typical White Lady ghost.

It seems unlikely that the local purveyors of these tales near Campo Viera today have been drawing upon Jaffe’s 1963 book. Can one realistically credit any that separate Argentine motorists have been inspired by reading Jaffe’s book to the point of inventing an identical sighting on the Yaza bridge and duly going to the police station to report it? Similarly, there is no identifiable transmission link connecting the spectre of the Yaza bridge with, for example, the Dame Blanche, who haunts “narrow bridges, thorn-filled ditches and river crossings” in Normandy (see *Night of Witches: Folklore, traditional recipes for celebrating* (2011) by Linda Raedisch) or “the Lady of Millinocket”, a White Lady ghost who prowls a bridge located on Route 11 on the Brownville Road outside Millinocket, Maine. (See *Haunted Bridges: 300 of America’s Creepiest Crossings* (2016) by Rich Newman). In the absence of an identifiable transmission route, the psychosocial hypothesis, and notions that witnesses are bizarrely acting out some folktale before the police for reasons known only to themselves, begin to look decidedly shaky.

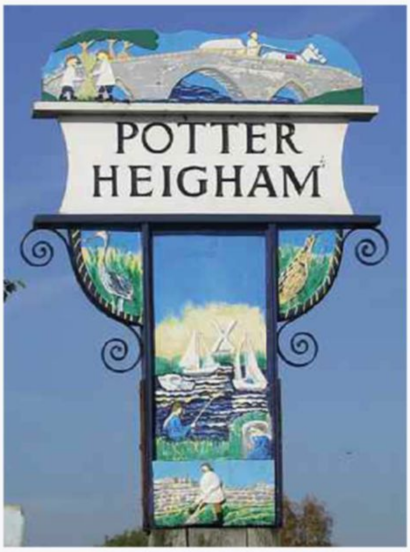
Of course, one never knows just how far esoteric traditions penetrate. Doubtless some folklorists might insist that just such a transmission has somehow occurred, a variation of the phantom hitchhiker story which enjoys its resonance from the satisfaction of having a beginning, middle and end, providing a measure of entertainment value. But first-hand witnesses to the hitchhiker and verifiable details always prove lacking, in contrast to the numerous individuals who have encountered White Ladies over the years.

Of course, judging by the UK, there is a small section of the public, often afflicted by mental disorders, who are attention-seeking fantasists, waste police time, make groundless complaints or even falsely confess to crimes they never committed. But why this form of false complaint? From the surfeit of reports of White Lady ghosts, past and present, at the very least, there is a cross-cultural hallucinatory disorder, hitherto unclassified by psychiatrists, causing otherwise sane individuals to perceive White Lady apparitions. These appearances are not confined by any means to bridges, but manifest in many different locations. There is scarcely a district in the UK of any size that does not claim at least one ‘White Lady’ or ‘Grey Lady’. Undoubtedly, oral tradition keeps these stories going, but they are reinforced by actual experience. They continue to be reported, and may appear on a moonlit summer’s night, in dense autumnal fog or in the depths of winter when the snow lies thick upon the ground. They may appear both in and out of doors, often at historic or ruined buildings. Actor Sir Alec Guinness saw one at a hotel room in India in 1984, during the filming of *A Passage to India*. In a letter to his wife dated 23 March 1984 made public in 2014, he wrote how: "A very conventional white ghost appeared, an elderly… woman in grey white and heavily veiled… I couldn't make out her face. She moved… with dignity down the side of my bed and as I clicked on the light she disappeared." (*D.Mail, 15 Feb 2014*).

For Jaffe, elements of significance are found in the white clothing (representing a burial shroud) the anonymous female figure and the fact that she moves from place to place (i.e. 'walks'). Alternatively, her white attire may be the gown of a bride dressed for her wedding, the point where she 'dies' to her old life and begins a fuller one in marriage. The ghost does not necessarily haunt with a view to committing harm, but can be dangerous or serve as a warning, typically of an impending death. Rather than actually causing the accidents at the Yaza, the ghost, like an Irish Banshee, might be a harbinger of them. Taking a Jungian perspective, Jaffe links her with the different aspects of classical goddesses; she notes the double or triple aspects of such deities: the virgin, mother and crone in mythology. For Jaffe, the White Lady is an expression of the unconscious mind in which such symbols dwell, and which manifest beyond the body, capable of taking on a degree of objective reality and emerging into consciousness. The conscious mind typically interprets them as discarnate spirits.

This is a complex theory, sharing some similarity with the theories of GNM Tyrrell advanced in his book *Apparitions* (1942). However, the mechanism whereby this could occur remains – like consciousness itself – mysterious. Despite Jung collaborating with the physicist Wolfgang Pauli to study paranormal phenomena and meaningful coincidences, nothing but a vague hypothesis could be developed to account for them. Neither Pauli (who was notorious for laboratory equipment breaking down around him) or the semi-mystical Jung could achieve a synthesis of psychology with the competing mathematical models applied in physics at the sub-atomic level (See *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, 1952).

Lacking any fundamental scientific understanding of consciousness, empirically testing such ideas with apparitions is currently beyond us. Jaffe notes how those who try to lay hands on White Lady apparitions – as one of her correspondents had attempted to do with his brother – simply find she evades their touch, melting away like a vapour.



IAN TAYLOR / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: Potter Heigham's village sign, showing the not-so-haunted bridge of a popular ghost story.

Three further grounds for rejecting purely psychosocial explanations for White Lady experiences – i.e. that they stem from stories already embedded in culture – may also be proposed. Firstly, there may be more than one witness at a time or they may be seen by consecutive witnesses. Secondly, what may be raised as a partial negative refutation of the idea can be found with the impact of Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* (1989). This has been a tremendously successful book and play, translated into Spanish and other languages and released internationally as a film. But we do not seem to be facing a resulting flood of 'Women in Black' sightings anywhere it has been shown.

Thirdly, the example of certain wholly invented ghost stories on bridges can be raised. A prime specimen is the haunting of Potter Heigham Bridge on the Norfolk broads. According to a chapter in the book *Ghosts of the Broads* (1931) by Dr Charles Sampson, noted medical man and yachting author, Potter Heigham Bridge is haunted every 31 May by a phantom coach that collides with the parapet. It is one of the best stories in the book, going back to 31 May 1741 when Lady Evelyn Carew married Sir Godfrey Haslitt at Norwich Cathedral, a union achieved by selling her soul to the Devil, aided by a local sorceress.

The bridal party returned to Batswick Hall and were celebrating when just before midnight an unearthly coach pulled by four black horses – initially believed to be that of a Bishop – drew up outside. Skeletons leapt out and ran into the hall and seized the shrieking and struggling bride, dragging her into the coach, which then tore away at a breakneck speed, surrounded by an eerie light. As it crossed the bridge, the carriage swerved and struck the parapet, smashing it into a thousand flaming pieces, casting the screaming bride, her skeleton kidnappers, horses and all into the dark waters of the River Thurne. Batswick Hall burnt down the same night. Sampson avers that at midnight on the anniversary, this diabolical wreck is repeated, citing five recent witnesses and mentioning his own plans to try and see it.

Though one of the best stories in Sampson's book, it received little attention until Peter Underwood included it in his influential *A Gazetteer of British Ghosts* (1971) stating that Sampson had told him of seeing the coach himself. Mention by Underwood led to the story appearing elsewhere, such as in Anthony Hippesley's *Coxe's Haunted Britain* (1973), though omitting the anniversary appearance. Highly successful reprints of Sampson's book by Jarrolds of Norwich in 1973, 1976 and 1982 found a ready audience among summer tourists by now flocking to the Norfolk Broads, which had opened up as a mass destination for inland boating holidays. The Potter Heigham coach also appeared in many popular ghost books; for example Frank Smyth in *Ghosts and Poltergeists* (1976) speculated that all stemmed from an exaggerated folk account of the burning down of Batswick Hall.

However, apart from its implausibility, I very soon began to doubt Underwood's claim of receiving the story direct from Sampson who had died in August 1940, when Underwood (born 1923) was just 17. Indeed, by the time Underwood included it in his *Guide to Ghosts and Haunted Places* (1996), his source changed to broadcaster AJ Alan (1883-1941) who lived locally. More pertinently, researcher MW Burgess (*Lantern* 37, summer 1982) revealed Sampson's story and the characters in it as complete inventions; there never was a Godfrey Haslitt or Evelyn Carew (the Carew baronetcy not being created until 1834). Unsurprisingly, the story and virtually everything else in Sampson's book proved fictional.

But crucial to the argument here, despite the Potter Heigham coach story having receiving wide circulation by the 1980s (as Burgess recognised few could be expected to read his exposure) and many people optimistically waiting for it each year, there was not a single witness. Nor, despite its drama, does it seem to have inspired any similar stories, or sightings at any other locations.

Sampson also claimed that a skeleton haunted the bridge at Acle, Norfolk. No one has seen that either. From this one may surmise it is the experience that must come first, not the story, though the latter may colour subsequent interpretations.

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STOKE NEWINGTON

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PARK HOTEL
- OVAL SPACE -
BETHNAL GREEN

SOLD OUT - SOLD OUT
22|09|17
SIGUR RÓS
- EVENTIM APOLLO -
HAMMERSMITH

25|09|17
ROBERT FORSTER
- SHAW THEATRE -
KING'S CROSS

25|09|17
JEN CLOHER
- THE LEXINGTON -

02|10|17
ANNIE HART
(AU REVOIR SIMONE)
- SHACKLEWELL ARMS -
DALSTON

09|10|17
STEVIE PARKER
- MOTH CLUB, HACKNEY -

09|10|17
PITOU
- ST PANCRAS OLD CHURCH -

10|10|17
THE PREATURES
- MOTH CLUB, HACKNEY -

10|10|17
JOLIE HOLLAND + SAMANTHA PARTON
- UNION CHAPEL -
ISLINGTON

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WITH
PUP
CAYETANA
EUROPE UK TOUR

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19|10|17
SOUND OF THE SIRENS
- THE WATER RATS -

24|10|17
PLAZA
- OLD BLUE LAST -
SHOREDITCH

27|10|17
STEVEN PAGE
- BUSH HALL -

04|11|17
PETER PERRETT
- ELECTRIC BALLROOM -

22|11|17
HVMM
- SEBRIGHT ARMS -
HACKNEY

26|11|17
JIM WHITE
- DINGWALLS -

29|11|17
MARIAM THE BELIEVER
- THE LEXINGTON -

30|11|17
SLEEPTALKING
- THE VICTORIA -
DALSTON

30|11|17
TOM WILLIAMS
- BUSH HALL -

01|12|17
JESCA HOOP
- UNION CHAPEL -
ISLINGTON

07|12|17
BERNARD FANNING
- THE GARAGE -

28|02|18
THE FRONT BOTTOMS
- ROUNDHOUSE -

ÁSGEIR
PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS
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ROUNDHOUSE
LONDON

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BREAKING CONVENTION

At a recent conference **GARY LACHMAN** found that the doctors have retaken the psychedelic asylum

ANJA BJORLO

ABOVE: Attendees at the Fourth International Conference on Psychedelic Consciousness gather in Greenwich, London.

Exactly when the history of psychedelics began is precisely the kind of question one might ask at a conference on psychedelics. If you'd asked it at 'Breaking Convention: the Fourth International Conference on Psychedelic Consciousness', held 30 June to 2 July 2017 at the University of Greenwich, London, you would probably have got a number of answers, each different and all hotly debated. One answer is that psychedelic history began in 1956 when Humphrey Osmond – the English psychiatrist who facilitated Aldous Huxley's famous mescaline trip (see **FT28-32**), recorded in *The Doors of Perception* – coined the word. Trying to determine exactly what the drug did to Huxley, Osmond wrote: "To fathom hell or soar angelic, just take a pinch of psychedelic."

The term, meaning "mind-altering," quickly caught on. A decade later, a nascent youth culture and its leaders – the Beatles – were singing the praises of what was being called "the psychedelic revolution." Criminalisation of the "sacrament" of LSD in 1966, combined with its indiscriminate use – most visible in the disastrous "summer of love" of 1967 (see **FT356:40-47**) – however, soon led to what had started life as a fascinating tool for inner exploration becoming taboo.

Fifty years on from the aborted "psychedelic revolution" some things have changed – mainstream attitudes toward the medical and psychotherapeutic uses of some psychedelic drugs for one. But other attitudes remain, as the organisers of the three-day conference admit. While they welcome the idea that medical use of psychedelics seems imminent – "We're going mainstream, baby," the conference schedule announced – other, more millenarian sentiments are not forgotten. "1967 was a psychedelic-led, Technicolor dream of potential, but the authorities refused to join the dance." But don't despair. "Now at the 50th Anniversary of the Summer of Love we find the Psychedelic Renaissance in full swing."[1] If prescription doses of MDMA (Ecstasy) and other mind-alterers will soon be available on the NHS, there is still a stubborn community of psychedelic revolutionaries determined to keep the spirit of '67 alive and kicking.

A tussle between two orthodoxies was shaping up in the psychedelic community

In fact, the impression I got as I made my way from one overwarm lecture hall to another – for talks on the benefits of ketamine, darkness therapy, the magical use of LSD, Bruce Parry's adventures with indigenous folk, psychedelics and midwifery, among many others – was that a tussle between two orthodoxies was shaping up in the psychedelic community. One, the medical and therapeutic mentality, represented most conspicuously by MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies), a kind of psychedelic trade union, wants to turn psychedelic drugs into *medicines*, licensed and regulated by the authorities, and made available through prescription to people suffering from depression and other related disorders. These are the people who want to make taking drugs *safe*, and they are the ones that the straights will most likely cotton on to.

The other orthodoxy grows out of the shamanic tradition of using drugs in a religious, spiritual context. The popular image of this is Carlos Castaneda's dubious Don Juan (see **FT117:42-44, 238:56-57**) but these days it's represented by a whole cadre of indigenous mystical teachers, mostly from South America. These are the ones who want to keep psychedelics like ayahuasca *sacred*. While the "safe" advocates see psychedelic use as healing in a personal way, the "sacred" advocates expand this to include the entire planet. Through psychedelics and the adoption of the lifestyles of the indigenous, non-Western, non-modern peoples associated with them, the 21st century psychedelic revolutionaries, rightly or wrongly, see the hope of the future. They too want to make taking drugs "safe," but what is important here is maintaining the "sacred" character of the nature/human symbiosis and all the ecological responsibility that this entails.

The last strain of psychedelic consciousness I encountered over the three-day event doesn't give a hoot about being safe or sacred but wants to keep psychedelics *strange*. Before the 1960s, many writers and artists found in drug experiences inspiration and access to unusual states of consciousness, which were valuable in themselves, and not for any utilitarian purpose, whether personal or planetary. These intrepid self-experimenters just took the stuff and let rip. In a milieu that increasingly favours finding socially acceptable reasons for taking drugs, these few rebels are the odd men out.

Strangely, for a conference aware of the summer of '67, there were few signs of it. Sure, at the Psychedelic Museum you could take a quick trip – no pun intended – down memory lane, past copies of *Gandalf's Garden*, paperbacks about LSD, album covers from the Doors and Hendrix, a Burroughs/Gysin Dream Machine, and even a drum skin supposedly owned by Pink Floyd's Syd Barret, although I was later told it was actually Brian Barritt's – which, for connoisseurs, would be even more interesting (Barritt was a mate of the most famous psychedelic revolutionary, Timothy Leary, who was conspicuously absent from the occasion). The lecture halls were named after famous figures: the Sabina stage, named after the *curandera* Maria Sabina, the Hofmann Hall, named after the discoverer of LSD, Albert Hofmann, and the Osmond Auditorium, named after Humphrey Osmond. But there was no Leary Lounge, Huxley Hangout, or McKenna Mezzanine, although Terrance's brother Dennis was on hand to try to explain once again exactly what happened during their notorious hallucinogenic-led "experiment at La Chorrera". He left it hanging, but characterised it as an "alien abduction episode with a psychedelic twist".

Perhaps the organisers wanted to avoid stereotypes and so forgot the usual suspects. Or perhaps there's some embarrassment about Leary, who more than anyone set clinical research into psychedelics back by decades, and McKenna, whose career as a psychedelic guru has come under recent scrutiny. Either way, there were no lectures on Leary and even Huxley was relegated to the backwaters of academic literary presentations, one of which, by Luke Dodson, I took in and found fascinating.

What I did see was enough to suggest that the "safe" camp was steadily gaining ground and that a kind of Huxleyan brave new world, in which psychopharmacology will play an increasingly determining role, seemed to be on the cards. Rick Doblin, a mover and shaker for MAPS, charted the steady progress being made in this direction, and a variety of other psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychotherapists echoed him with reports on their own success in using psychedelics in a therapeutic context. This could be very specific. Friederike Meckel-Fischer, a German psychotherapist, highlighted at what points a therapist should intervene in a trip in order to work on overcoming a variety of trauma. While this may be counted as a victory in the struggle to make psychedelics socially acceptable, not to mention legal, people in the "sacred" camp have second thoughts about plants, herbs, and their related entheogenic – "god inducing" – substances being put under a too tightly regulated lock and key.

Some, like the Seed Sistas, regulars at festivals across the land, are for turning away from mainstream acceptance and finding our medicines on our own. Karen Lawton and Fiona Heckles are hedge-witches dedicated to exploring the healing potentials of plants, mostly those available in one's own backyard. Rather than have the medicinal virtues of our rooted friends given back to us via the BMA, they share their knowledge and expertise about a variety of local growths, like henbane and mandragora, so that we can do it ourselves. One of their most popular concoctions is their psychedelic sex-lubricant, which promises two ecstasies for the price of one. I didn't have a chance to sample this, but a peyote balm applied judiciously seemed to have a calming effect. I should mention that the only substance I did ingest, during Danny Nemu's talk about drugs in the Bible, was a pearl of frankincense, which did little but get stuck to my teeth.

The magical aspects of psychedelics brought a slight occult flavour to the mix. Chaos magician Julian Vayne illustrated the difference between a psychedelic "session", which sounds awfully

FEUILLE D'AVIS
DE LAUSANNE
En attendant que Berne statue sur son sort
TIM LEARY
répond
à la «Feuille»
OZ
LSD

PHOTOS: ANJA BJORLO

ABOVE LEFT: The University of Greenwich's David Luke with a shaman. **ABOVE CENTRE:** Notorious psychedelic dinosaur Dennis McKenna arrives in Greenwich. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Glimpses of the Sixties could be found in the 'Psychedelic Museum' even if the 'Summer of Love' was largely sidelined by the conference.

DELIC
NY -
GUIDE
BREAKING CONVENTION
2017

ANJA BJORLO

ABOVE LEFT: Occultist Julian Vayne puts the sacred into the psychedelic. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Seed Sistas Karen Lawton and Fiona Heckles are doing it for themselves.

clinical, and a psychedelic "ceremony", which sounds a lot more fun. Fundamentally it's all a matter of attitude, but having the right one can infuse even the simple pleasure of a joint with sacred significance. Patrick Everitt lectured on the place of psychedelics in the work of Aleister Crowley, but stopped short of perpetuating the myth that Crowley introduced peyote to Europe. That story was masterfully related by Mike Jay, historian of drug use, author of numerous books, and curator of drug and medicine related exhibitions for the Wellcome Collection. Jay related the fascinating story of a decade of research into peyote involving seminal figures like William James, Havelock Ellis, and other self-experimenters, all of whom preceded Crowley's use of it, and who paved the way for the mescaline that opened Aldous Huxley's doors of perception. Along the way, the potent cactus – the first psychedelic scrutinised by Western science, but now forgotten – introduced poets, writers, and artists to its peculiar visions. If I have one suggestion for future conferences, it's that historical presentations like Jay's play a larger role in the proceedings.

Rupert Sheldrake, the eminent biologist, talked about how the psychedelic experience can be understood in terms of his theory of morphic resonance (see **FT286:38-40, 353:52-53**). This posits a kind of memory-field, not transmitted by the genes, which our own experiences can add to. So for Sheldrake, the kinds of psychedelic experiences had by the pioneers of the 1950s and 60s still impact on those of today – and these in turn affect those that will come in the future. So it is important how you trip today – if you do at all – because it will, according to Sheldrake, affect how someone else does tomorrow.

Not all altered states discussed were drug-induced. Jennifer Dumpert gave a lively talk on her experiences with hypnagogia, that strange state of consciousness in between sleeping and waking and its related phenomena of "liminal dreams." While we can slip into a liminal dream practically anywhere – I admit to entering a few during some of the less than captivating talks – here too our plant friends can help us in our explorations. Certain herbs, termed oneirogens, can facilitate visions of different characters and dimensions, from the sudden flash of a hypnagogic hallucination to the vivid crackle of a lucid dream. Josie Malinowski brought the two altered states together in a talk that looked at the similarities between psychedelic episodes and our nightly natural trips. Both share strange transformations of everyday reality and both are sidelined by mainstream medical science, although if MAPS has their way, at least some psychedelic experience will gain official recognition.

Martin Lee, co-author of the classic *Acid Dreams,* reminded us of the CIA's role in the early days of psychedelia. Like Thomas Roberts, Lee formed part of a token show of what one chairperson referred to as the "dinosaurs" of psychedelia, the old school that the new crew both nods to with respect and wishes it could leave behind. Perhaps this muted acknowledgement is a recognition that, as the organisers say, "It's all been done before," and "the lessons we can learn from psychedelics are never new". [2] But one hopes that at the seminars on DMT, ibogaine, microdosing, and the pineal gland, as well as the many workshops, some new insights and perspectives might have popped up.

The high point of the conference for me, though, was Erik Davis's brilliant talk on "The Weirdness of Being," a persuasive argument for keeping it "strange". While recognising the value of both the "safe" and "sacred" approaches, Davis wondered about the place of the psychedelic experience in contexts that aim to make it more acceptable, which ultimately means utilitarian. Tracing the notion of the "weird" from its Gothic roots, through Lovecraft and other pulp masters, to its embrace in psychedelia, Davis asks a difficult question. Has the gradual seepage of the "weird", which means a deviation from the main route, into mainstream culture neutered it? When everything is weird, as it seems to be today, what's left for those with a penchant for the *outré*? What's left to transgress when nothing's forbidden? In a culture occupied with what is safe and sacred, where is there a place for the strange? Maybe this presents a convention we might consider breaking...

NOTES

1 Introduction schedule for *Breaking Convention 4th International Conference on Psychedelic Consciousness*

2 Ibid.

CURSE OF THE FAIRIES

Disturbance of sacred fairy sites can have dire consequences for Irish infrastructure projects...

SARAH777

ROOTEDSEEDSPROJECT.WORDPRESS.COM

ABOVE: The N22, linking County Kerry and County Cork; are dips in the road caused by the disturbance of fairy forts? **ABOVE RIGHT**: The fairy thorn beside the N18 in County Clare, which delayed road building and was spared destruction. **BELOW**: Danny Healy-Rae, member of parliament and firm believer in the 'Little People'.

Bad luck caused by disturbed fairy forts has caused a dip in the N22, a major road between County Kerry and County Cork, according to an independent TD (Irish member of parliament). Danny Healy-Rae said the dip on the left-hand side of the road just before the Kerry Way had been repaired before – at a cost of 40,000 euros – but had mysteriously reappeared. "There are numerous fairy forts in that area," he said. "I know that they are linked. Anyone that tampered with them back over the years paid a high price and had bad luck." Asked if he believed in fairies, he said the local belief – which he shared – was that "there was something in these places you shouldn't touch". These were "sacred places" and fairies were believed to inhabit them. "I have a machine standing in the yard right now," said the TD, who owns a plant hire company. "If someone told me to go out and knock a fairy fort or touch it, I would starve first."

In Irish folklore, it is believed that disturbing areas said to have strong connections to fairies can bring bad luck or a curse. These areas include fairy forts, also known as raths or lios, which are the remains of hillforts or ancient circular dwellings, and fairy trees or thorn bushes. Some people believe that destroying or tampering with these forts, trees or bushes, could lead to them dying young or becoming seriously ill.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland say they do not have a fairy policy

Mr Healy-Rae first raised the issue of fairies at a Kerry County Council meeting in February 2007 after the N22, then a relatively new national primary road, developed a dip near Curraglass. In a formal motion on the cause of the hollow, Healy-Rae, then a councillor, asked: "Is it fairies at work?" The council's road department replied that it was due to "a deeper underlying subsoil/geotechnical problem". The issue was again raised at a county council meeting in early August this year, where Healy-Rae's daughter Maura, who is a councillor, said her father was convinced fairies were in the area. Mr Healy-Rae said the road network passes through an extensive area of standing stones, stone circles and ancient monuments rich in folklore and fairy stories. He warned that the dip in the road needed to be dealt with before a driver came across it suddenly and lost control. Transport Infrastructure Ireland, a state agency responsible for national road and public transport infrastructure, say they do not have a fairy policy, but a spokesperson said it is always wise to wish the 'Little People' the best.

This isn't the first time that the fairies have had an impact on major road building projects in Ireland. In 1999, as part of the upgrading of the N18 between Limerick and Galway, a £100 million plan to build a bypass around Newmarket-on-Fergus, Co Clare, threatened a fairy thorn bush with destruction. Local folklorist Eddie Lenihan identified the *sceach* as a muster point on a fairy path and warned of "terrible consequences" should it be cut down, including higher than usual casualties from future road accidents. Luckily, the thorn was surveyed and work on the bypass continued around it, taking care to leave the sacred bush untouched (**FT128:24**). In August 2003, the tree was attacked with a chainsaw by an unknown party who was never apprehended; perhaps he fell foul of the curse (**FT169:08**). Thankfully, the tree survived the attack and soon showed fresh growth (**FT175:11**). Recent online references to the thorn suggest that it continues to thrive.

A couple of years ago, a listener contacted BBC Radio Ulster to talk about a fairy thorn growing at Ormeau Golf Club. Denis McKnight, secretary of the club, said it has been there longer than anyone could remember. "The club was opened in 1893 so it's at least 122 years old," he said. "None of our green keepers will touch it or cut it down. They won't even trim it." He said that balls had been lost in the tree and never seen again. "If you hit the tree and don't apologise you're guaranteed to have a bad game," he said. "When people visit the club we have to warn them about the fairy thorn. We tell them to nod to it as they go past and they have to apologise if they hit it." He said the club used the thorn on their logo for a while and that they will never cut it down.

BBC News, 13 Feb 2015; Irish Times, Irish Examiner, BBC News, 8 Aug 2017.

UNNATURAL WORLD

Environmental oddities, from the amazing tree man of Bangladesh to the 'tattooed' fish of the Philippines...

LEFT: Abdul Samad Sheikh, reforesting Bangladesh one tree at a time. **BELOW**: Some of the yellow blobs infesting French beaches.

TREE SAMAD

Abdul Samad Sheikh, 60, has planted at least one tree every day since he was 12, which means that he has so far planted a small forest of more than 17,500 trees. Fondly known as "Tree Samad" in his native town of Faridpur, central Bangladesh, he has worked as a rickshaw driver for most of his life. The modest job earns him about £1 per day, barely enough to feed his family, but he somehow manages to also buy at least one tree from the Faridpur Horticulture Centre every day. He considers it his duty to the world. "For the whole night I cannot sleep if I have not planted a tree," he said. "Mostly I plant them on government land so nobody can cut them down later. I also water them, and if I see anyone cutting a tree I protest it and scold them. I love all creatures, animals too, but especially trees."

Samad, his wife Jorna, and four of their children live in two modest huts, on a piece of land that belongs to the Faridpur deputy commissioner's office. They have no land of their own, and sometimes his meager earnings are not enough to cover the family's needs, but he always prioritises his daily tree purchase. Jorna sometimes scolds him for it, but he doesn't care.

In a video posted by *The Daily Star*, a Bangladeshi newspaper, his neighbours express their respect and admiration for his dedication. "It's not only the trees," said Sakandar Ali. "Samad is a very helpful man. One can ask of him anything and he will do his best to help without reservation. His is that rare type of personality that is so much needed in our society." For his efforts, Samad was recently awarded 100,000 taka (£966) by *The Daily Star* to help him build a better home for his family. In his acceptance speech, the "nature guardian" asked everyone to follow his example, and protect the environment. "I can't do it alone, I need the help of you all," he said.

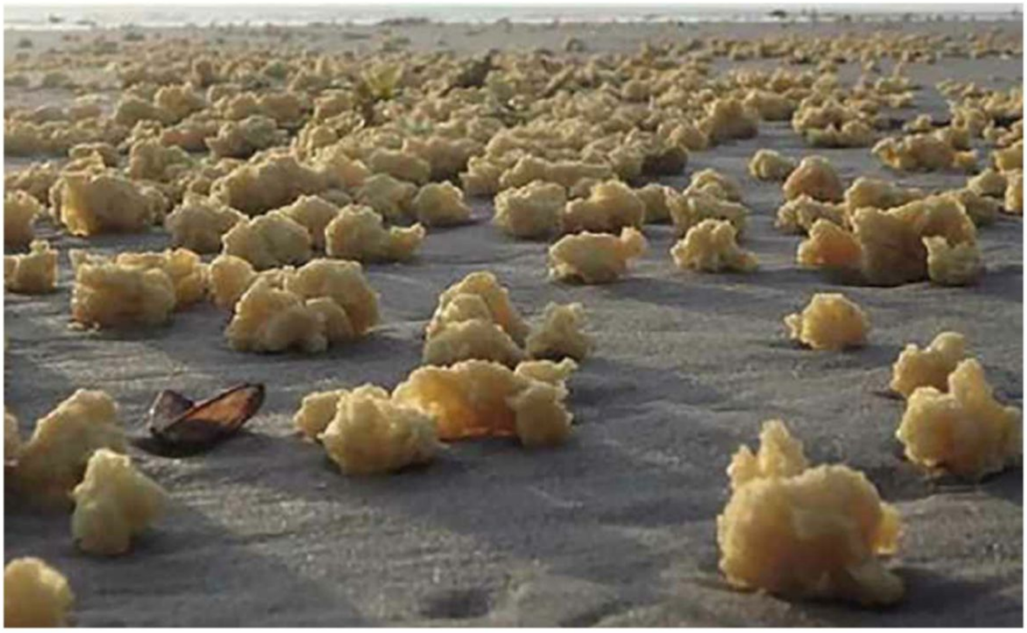
> *"For the whole night I cannot sleep unless I have planted a tree," says Samad*

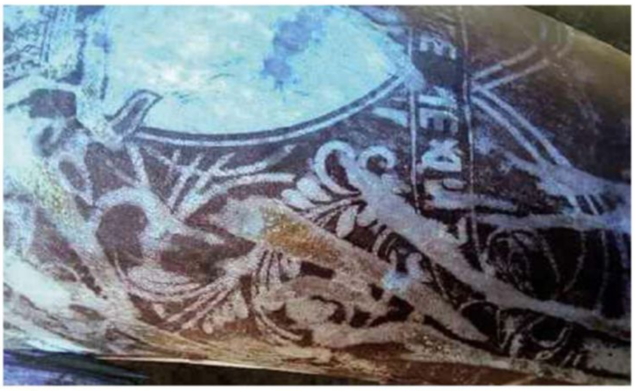
Other admirable souls have dedicated their lives to turning wastelands into lush forests once again, such as "The Mother of Trees", a childless Indian women who has planted and fostered hundreds of banyan trees, Anil and Pamela Malhotra, a couple who turned 300 acres of farmland into a lush jungle, or Jadav Payeng, India's "Forest Man", who single-handedly planted a 550-hectare forest. *Oddity Central, 4 July 2017.*

YELLOW FLUFF BALLS

Hundreds of yellow, fluffy blobs washed up on the shores of northern France in the week following 12 July. The balls of goo were found along many miles of the English Channel coastline. They looked like sponges, very unappetizing hunks of butterscotch mousse or possibly the biggest balls of earwax ever. Some of France's most famous beaches – Le Touquet, Wimereux, La Slack, Le Portel, Hardelet, Equihen-Plage, Stella, Berck – were covered in clumps of the oily residue. Samples were identified as paraffin wax. Jonathan Hénicart, president of the Sea-Mer Association, a non-profit organisation that protects coastlines from pollution, said the brittle material was greasy to the touch, but looked a bit like yellow polyurethane balls. One theory is that the material had come from the hot grease in boat exhaust, which freezes when it hits frigid seawater.

Paraffin or candle wax frequently washes ashore along coastlines. For instance, in May, waxy yellow clumps washed ashore on North Yorkshire beaches. In the aftermath of German beach contamination with paraffin, the North and Baltic seas were extensively polluted with paraffin wax, according to a 2014 report. Paraffin wax is typically made up of long strands of hydrocarbons and is used for insulation, lubrication, corrosion protection, cosmetics and candles. Paraffin is often transported in large





ABOVE: Mysterious markings on a fish caught in the Philippines.
BELOW: A seagull in St Ives contemplates ‘Flying Ant Day’…

quantities by tanker ships, and because it floats, will rise to the top of the water and wash ashore in clumps, where it mixes with sand and other contaminants. *Live Science, D.Mail (online) 19 July; mnn.com, 1 Aug 2017.*

‘TATTOOED’ FISH

A fish bearing intricate blue designs of a crown and a shield was caught in the province of Lopez in the Philippines last May. Its photograph (above) was posted on local channel *GMA News*, provoking thousands of comments from people trying to work out what happened. Had it been tattooed and then thrown back in the sea? Maybe it was the reincarnation of a god. Someone suggested it might have escaped from an underwater jail where marine biologists mark marine creatures with strange symbols. A more likely explanation was offered by Steve Clark: “This was probably caused by some sort of trash or fabric that had been embedded in the fish’s skin and over time imprinted this design onto it.” *Metro, 8 May 2017.*

SEAGULLS SMASHED ON FLYING ANTS

Seagulls suffered as the nation experienced the annual “Flying Ant Day” – when Queen ants lead the males on a wild chase, with the fittest gaining the right to mate. The ants pose no risk to humans, but seagulls can’t resist the tasty treats, which make them extremely inebriated on formic acid in the ants’ bodies. This avian booze-up has been given as one reason why the gulls were dying after flying into buildings or cars.

“This year we’ve had a certain set of circumstances, including record temperatures in June, and this has effected chicks,” said Peter Rock, a gull expert and research assistant at Bristol University. Although a lot of chicks will survive, the Sun is the killer. It is hot on the rooftops where they nest and they will not be used to the heat as they expect it to be cool here.” Mr Rock believes the deaths and flying ants are unrelated: “All they are is a tasty snack, they can munch their way through quite a lot, they are a good source of nourishment.” *cornwalllive.com, 8 July 2017.*

MATT CARDY / GETTY IMAGES

-JVL- / CREATIVE COMMONS

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

216: HARES

The myth

When you see two hares boxing during the mating season, you’re witnessing a dispute over territorial or mating rights between males.

The “truth”

Hares really do box, standing up on their hind legs and thumping each other with their paws, their angled stances irresistibly reminding modern humans of 19th century prizefighters. And what a glorious sight it must be for those very few people lucky enough to witness it, now that hares are an endangered species in Britain – and are still, incidentally, the only game species in the country that does not have a shooting close season. But even if you do see a pair of boxing hares, you are not in fact seeing a struggle for dominance between two bucks – but a female declining the attentions of a suitor, in a manner that allows for little ambiguity. The mating season of the European or Brown hare (*Lepus europæus*) lasts from January to August, but it’s during the “Spring frenzy”, or “Mad March”, when the hares are at their most visibly excitable. For a long time it was assumed that boxing involved males, but it’s now been shown that it’s almost always a female preventing a male from mating with her. Whether this is because she isn’t yet ready to mate, or because she’s testing the male’s fitness, is less clear. When hares chase each other at high speed during the Spring frenzy, this is more likely to be a male chasing a rival away from a receptive female.

Sources

www.hare-preservation-trust.co.uk/status.php; *BBC Wildlife* magazine, Mar 2010; www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/European_Hare; www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2016/03/why-do-hares-box/; www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/mar/25/specieswatch-march-hare-countryside

Disclaimer

If you’re knowledgeable about *Leporidæ*, or indeed pugilism, you are more than welcome to give any errors a thorough spanking on the letters page.

Mythchaser

Bears don’t really like honey, a reader has heard; when they raid a bees’ nest they’re after the pupæ and larvæ, the honey being an irrelevant extra. Sweet fact, or sticky myth?

NECROLOG

This month, we bid farewell to a couple of literary mavericks – one English, one American – who each, in his own way, challenged prevailing orthodoxies...

SUSAN GREENHILL

LEFT: Heathcote Williams at the Hay on Wye Literary Festival, May 1989.

HEATHCOTE WILLIAMS

This erudite and perpetually incensed non-joiner was admired early on by William Burroughs, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. His first play, *The Local Stigmatic* (1966), gave a prophetic and chilling lowdown on today's celebrity culture, while his recent poetic broadside against his fellow old Etonian, *Boris Johnson: The Blond Beast of Brexit – A Study in Depravity* (2016), an excoriating Swiftean attack on the foreign secretary's lies, evasion and adultery, showed he had lost none of his devastating vituperation.

Heathcote's muse was fuelled by a witty and beautiful anger that he channelled in the extended polemical poem *Whale Nation* (1988), which begins:

From space, the planet is blue.
From space, the planet is the territory
Not of humans, but of the whale.
Blue seas cover seven-tenths of the earth's surface,
And are the domain of the largest brain ever created,
With a fifty-million-year-old smile.

Ted Hughes described the poem as "brilliant, cunning, dramatic and wonderfully moving, a steady accumulation of grandeur and dreadfulness."

It was followed by *Sacred Elephant* (1989), lauding the great pachyderm, and *Autogeddon* (1991), raging against the plague of the motorcar and described by JG Ballard as "tremendous" and "powerfully impacting". For Heathcote, car culture is the "humdrum holocaust, the third world war nobody bothered to declare."

These epic poems were written while he lived in Port Eliot in Cornwall, seat of his friend Peregrine Eliot, 10th Earl of St Germans (another old Etonian). In all three works, the words were spliced with a wealth of evocative photographs and supplemented by a remarkable anthology of prose extracts from the worlds of science and literature. All three were filmed by the BBC. We should also mention his delightful poem *Falling for a Dolphin* (1988). Heathcote himself made notable recordings of Buddhist scripture, Dante and the Bible, and a collection of shorter poems, *Zanzibar Cats* (2011), which skewered political absurdity, planetary destruction and social justice mishaps with delightful glee and great verbal dexterity. "If poetry isn't revolutionary, it's nothing," was his credo.

Heathcote was a member of the Magic Circle, learned fire-eating from Bob Hoskins (and accidentally set himself ablaze when demonstrating his new talent to his then girlfriend, the model Jean Shrimpton) and helped establish the independent republic of Frestonia in Notting Hill (1977) while running a venture for squatters, the Ruff Tuff Cream Puff Estate Agency with Nicholas Albery. In 1974 he co-founded (with graphic designer Richard Adams) Open Head Press, which produced pamphlets, postcards and other documents in the tradition of 18th- and 19th-century "radical squibs", beginning with *The Abdication of Queen Elizabeth II*. He contributed to *International Times*, the radical vegetarian magazine *Seed*, *The Fanatic*, and the animal rights magazine *The Beast*. With Bill Levy, Jim Haynes and Germaine Greer he was a founding editor of *Suck* (1969), the notorious underground Amsterdam sexual liberation magazine. He thought of himself as a fortean, clipping newspapers voraciously, and for many years contributed material to *Fortean Times* – which he described as "invaluable and invariably ahead of the game".

He starred as the inscrutable magician Prospero in Derek Jarman's extraordinary 1979 film of *The Tempest*. He also appeared in *Wish You Were Here* (1987), Sally Potter's *Orlando* (1992), Mike Figgis's *The Browning Version* (1994) and *Miss Julie* (1999), Des McAnuff's *Cousin Bette* (1998), and even *Basic Instinct 2* (2006). For Marianne Faithfull he wrote the song "Why d'ya do it?", which she recorded on her 1979 album *Broken English*. In 1990 *The Local Stigmatic* became an unreleased film produced by and starring Al Pacino.

The Speakers (1964), Heathcote's first book written when he was 23, was about the postwar soap-box orators in Hyde Park. In his review, Harold Pinter said: "These are the only people I'd ever want to listen to." Perhaps his best play was the groundbreaking *AC/DC*, staged at London's Royal Court Theatre in 1970 before transferring to New York. This study of warring states of mind, originally titled *Skizotopia*, ended with the lead character being amateurishly trepanned in response to the "information explosion" in which "all ideas and opinions would be available to all people and therefore rendered impotent". Other short plays included *Remember the Truth Dentist* (1974), directed by Ken Campbell and described as a full-frontal assault on the Western "death culture" in favour of "a Zen- and sperm-orientated Mongolian cluster-fuck"; *Hancock's Last Half Hour* (1977), a short monologue for the morose comic on the brink of suicide in an Australian hotel; and *The Immortalist* (1978), a TV interview with a 278-year-old man about his refusal to die.

A cascade of poetry and pamphlets ensued over the years, many of them self-published, or distributed privately. His last volume of poetry about Trump, *American Porn*, was published last January. One poem concludes:

Donald Trump is really Donald Drumpf,
To give him his ancestral, and risible name.
It suggests dumbness, even the passing of wind
As well as the merciful transience of fame.

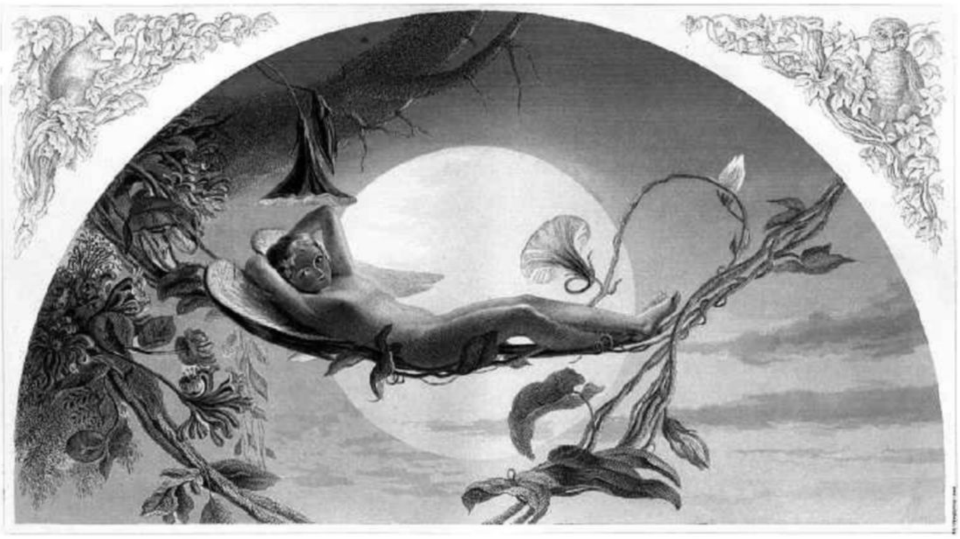
Heathcote, who lived in Oxford with his long-term partner Diana Senior, a historian, spent the last 20 years in obscurity and illness. He turned to painting and sculpting, becoming proficient in both. He is survived by Diana and their two daughters, China and Lily, and three grandchildren; and Charlie Gilmour, his son with the novelist Polly Samson.

John Henley Heathcote Williams, polymath, anarchist, poet and dramatist, born Helsby, Cheshire 15 November 1941; died from emphysema Oxford 1 July 2017, aged 75.

HARRY MATHEWS

Mathews was an American novelist whose works were so impenetrable they divided critics into those who regarded them as "groundbreaking" and those who threw up their hands in despair. For many decades he was the sole American member of Oulipo, a Parisian collective dedicated to creating literary works using predetermined "constrained" techniques such as mathematical formulæ and limited vocabularies in the writing process, subverting the romantic notion of authorship as being about inspiration. Mathews's first book, *The Conversions* (1962), ostensibly an adventure story about a man trying to decipher carvings on an ancient ritual axe, so impressed *The Paris Review* that it printed a 70-page excerpt and he became a cult figure among a certain type of mainly French literary connoisseur. He was elected a member of Oulipo in 1973 after rewriting Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* using the vocabulary from a Julia Child recipe for a cauliflower dish (and vice versa). One of his more accessible books, *My Life in CIA* (2005) – highly recommended by Paul Sieveking – is described as a "true" recollection of a year in 1970s Paris when he was rumoured to be a CIA agent and took up a friend's suggestion that he should act the part. The plot becomes increasingly preposterous.

Harry Burchell Mathews, novelist, born Manhattan 14 Feb 1930; died 25 Jan 2017, aged 86.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

SEEING THINGS

I spent a very pleasant afternoon, this week, going through Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos's Catalogue of 200 Type-I UFO Events in Spain and Portugal (1976). I was, as it happens, in search of fairy-like entities – the overlap between fairies and aliens always proves fascinating. But I also came across a phenomenon that I have found in many lists of anomalous events: drivers and guards over-represented as witnesses of the 'impossible'. How often have we read about a driver suddenly glimpsing a ghost, or a fairy, or an ABC or a headless alien, crossing the road, walking by the side of the road, or standing in an adjacent field? But there are also many cases where sentries or guards have claimed to have encountered supernatural entities. Nineteenth-century notices of sentries seeing ghosts are particularly common: I have a list... Ballester Olmos has, meanwhile, a couple of cases with military sentries, and one with a poor man guarding a melon field, all of whom came face-to-face with otherworldly beings. The melon guard was condemned to watching 50 men dressed in blue walk into a hole in the ground near Seville!

HOW OFTEN HAVE WE READ ABOUT A DRIVER SUDDENLY GLIMPSING A GHOST, OR A FAIRY, AN ABC OR AN ALIEN?

Of course, there may be more practical reasons why people in cars see 'things': certainly, I see more wildlife in cars than I do on foot – cars have the potential to come and go very quickly and might surprise 'visitors'. Likewise, sentries are around at night when other people are not, and that is when they tend to have their who-goes-there experiences. The other possibility, though, is that drivers and guards fall into a kind of sleepy concentration for their important but boring responsibilities. 'Highway hypnosis' is an established phenomenon. Is it possible that drivers or sentries can enter a trance state compatible with visions? Do their brains throw images into the world as a projector splashes light onto the wall? Possibly. But, then, why don't other people prone to trances have these experiences: for example, video-game players or painters or musicians? Possibly because this group's trance is focused on an object in their hands or in front of their eyes, and their muscles are twitching. The driver or sentry has to concentrate, but also interact with the wider world around him, getting ready for any shock stimuli: the consequence of not doing so is possible death for the driver, sentry and others.

Another relevant group here would be long-distance walkers or runners. But do they 'see things'? One famous example is Pheidippides meeting the god Pan on his epic journey to Sparta before the battle of Marathon. Here's betting that there are other experiences out there waiting to be collated… I've never met a ghost while out walking, but, 20 miles in, the mind enters, in my experience, a curious state.

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

Hope springs eternal. Or not

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

NASA / BILL INGALLS

One goes in this life from Geezerhood to Old Geezerhood and then, once you've devoured your biblical ration of three-score and 10 years, you're nowt but another coffin dodger. Ufology fast approaches this venerable state.

To mark its 70th birthday, Vicente-Juan (V-J) Ballester Olmos and Thomas 'Ed' Bullard have produced a brace of papers: "The Nature of UFO Evidence: Two Views" (www.academia.edu/33352049). They're not exactly full of streamers, balloons and party hats. Indeed, some may take V-J's contribution as less party popper than party pooper. After half a century of research, he has reluctantly concluded that, in so many words, ufology has been dodging its coffin since well before its 'official' time. Introducing the papers on his UFOCAT blog, he says: "These are the views of a sincere investigator of a mystery that seems to play with us, until we realise that we have simply allowed ourselves to be led astray by a number of surrounding circumstances and influences. What seems at first sight absurd, really is illogical, irrational, incoherent… finally inadmissible." V-J's wan conclusion is based on his long and fruitless hunt for evidence that UFOs are extraterrestrial craft. It would be both unkind and otiose to remark that he was perhaps looking in the wrong direction. He already knows this: "Somehow Mark Twain's phrase is applicable here: 'You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.'" And besides, "…it hurts. There is nothing more frustrating than realising that you have wasted your life in the pursuit of a mirage or a delusion."

In this, as in all his work, V-J is nothing if not thorough. He covers, and dismantles, all the bases of ETH- enamoured ufology, from 'Attitudes' to 'Epistemology' and beyond. His take on ufological history and the grip of the ETH upon it is illuminating: "[A]n idea based largely on poorly investigated incidents and shaped by the fertile imagination of writers fond of sensationalism finally created a 'real' phenomenon that both housed and draws its observational substance from those previous, weak tales… This has been possible by the conjunction of a continuing flow of new UFO stories, increasingly weird and absurd, and the fuel contributed by magazines and books, motion pictures, television films and documentaries. Once the belief is established, sightings never cease to pour into the system, and a newborn mythology grows and matures." What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed, as Alexander Pope had it.

V-J sees plenty of future in what Robert Sheaffer has neatly labelled "retail ufology (bread and circuses for the crowd)" – as anyone might. But, notes V-J: "Practically every major UFO case defended as unaccountable [sic] by believers has a plausible counter-explanation among sceptics" and so, he concludes, "I more than anyone wish to be proved wrong, but all indications are that in the future flying saucers and unidentified flying objects will be categorised as a mass sociological phenomenon." In other words, a myth, and it is a very potent one.

Ed Bullard is more sanguine. He says at the outset that he does "not want to hear that we have tilted at windmills for decades, but sadly, I have to agree with most of what [V-J] says." This will come as no surprise to those acquainted with Bullard's increasingly disillusioned writing in recent years. He reinforces one of V-J's points unequivocally: "A complaint that science ignores the UFO evidence is really a complaint that UFOs have not produced any evidence worthy to attract scientific attention." And he admits what is surely heresy in some quarters: "[I]n the end Condon was right: The study of UFOs contributes nothing to physical scientific knowledge, much less proof of alien visitation." Yet he clings on: "I still cannot accept the absoluteness of [V-J's] conclusion. I still find some substance among UFO reports and see a path, albeit narrow, that may lead to a true anomalous phenomenon, and without detours into the 'alternative facts' of UFO mythology." As he points out, fairly and properly, "UFOs can be both mythic and phenomenal at the same time. This duality complicates the job of understanding, but we can live with it and work around it by learning to separate the human contributions from the objective basis." This raises (in my mind at least) J Allen Hynek's great first question when considering a UFO report – "Unidentified to whom?" One implication of that dry enquiry involves the reliability and accuracy of the report. Ed wants ufologists to trawl the *reliable* historical record of UFOs for anomalies and seek patterns in them. How anyone is to decide what is a reliable report he leaves unexplained, and he admits that revelations from previous attempts (such as that sightings cluster around a particular day of the week – John Keel's 'Wednesday Phenomenon') have been what you might call a tad sterile.

Perhaps oddest is his choice of challenging unknowns waiting to be confirmed or solved. The Minot AFB case of October 1968 I can buy, *pro tem*, on the basis of Tom Tulien's possibly exhaustive investigation (www.minotb52ufo.com/index.php), which I've yet to see any sceptic tackle. Lincoln La Paz's 1947 sighting of a "white, rounded object" is surely too shrouded in the mists of time for plausible re-evaluation. But to cite the 2006 Chicago O'Hare 'cookie-cutter' case as a "foundation for a genuine and puzzling" phenomenon is bizarre. Witnesses said the sighting lasted anywhere between two and 15 minutes, while the object was something between six and 35ft across, at an altitude between 500 and 1,500ft, and maybe rotating or maybe not. Nothing showed on radar and amazingly no one photographed whatever it was. As a foundation for anything, this is all pretty sandy, isn't it?

"Maybe I grasp at straws like a true believer still holding out," says Bullard. Sorry, Ed, but I fear that's just what you sound like.

Close Encounters with the British Mind

JENNY RANDLES looks back 40 years at the way one film changed the UK perception of UFOs

Last month I told how 40 years ago famous UFO scientist Dr J Allen Hynek collaborated with Steven Spielberg on the trailblazing UFO movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

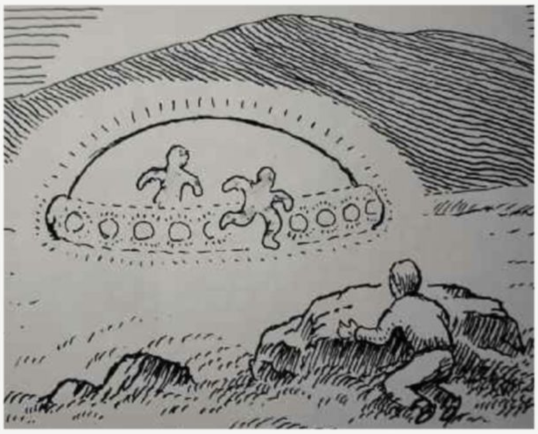
The film was released in the UK in March 1978. I was finishing my media diploma, editing *Northern UFO News*, completing my first UFO book and working with BUFORA and *Flying Saucer Review*. Thanks to this combination of activities, I was invited to help with promotion of this 'true life' UFO drama. Such had been the film's success in the US over the previous winter, it was clear the media would go to town with more newspaper, magazine and TV coverage than UFOs had ever received in the UK before.

At a posh restaurant in London I sat with some elder statesmen of the field, including the erudite *FSR* editor Charles Bowen and the eccentric Gordon Creighton, trying to inject a little sobriety into their talk of alien bodies in secret facilities, global cover-ups, KGB hit lists and the idea that 'genies' (or *djinn*) could be behind 'alien' contacts.

I think that having a science and media background and, at only 25, not being committed to a particular conviction as to what UFOs might be, got me the publicity role by default (or perhaps it was because my more restrained views didn't scare off the movie moguls seeking our assistance). This meant doing talks at cinemas and co-ordinating with the national newspapers planning features around the release of the movie. It also possibly helped that I had written a special edition of our regional magazine (a booklet titled 'Close Encounters of the Northern Kind'). At 16 pages, this was my first ever UFO 'book' and described cases we had investigated in recent years. After printing, I gave it at cost price (20p) to any local UFO groups so that they could resell at 40p and raise funds to help them study UFOs in their own town or city. This was the extent of my plan to use the movie to help ufology, but I could see that the moguls realised it might help promote the movie in those same places too.

So I found myself working with both the *Sun* and *Daily Express* on major series they ran to coincide with the film. I knew this would be a great opportunity to try to get some sensible thinking about UFOs out there, and also a terrific way to attract witnesses who might never have known where to report their sightings.

The *Sun* series ran for four days and covered some of the cases in the booklet. The paper included contact details for our regional NUFON team, which saw over 200 cases come our way in the next few weeks. The *Express* went even further, with eight days of stories, serialisation of the movie novelisation and at least one front-page banner headline, the first to appear in the UK I think. They asked for both letters and phone calls to a 24-hour hot line they had set up and were overwhelmed with cases.



LEFT: The Wylfa Hill case of 1975.

I spent weeks reading countless letters and listening to those tapes. There were drunken calls and accounts of innocuous sightings and – every now and then – a report that made me sit up and mobilise the resources of BUFORA, NUFON and FSR. The *Express* told readers they were staggered by the 6,000 letters and calls they received.

The media coverage of UFOs around the movie was less impressive. One case from Cheshire involving aliens and a UFO seen in a field of cattle was transplanted to a different part of the UK and billed a 'close encounter of the moo-ving kind' by the tabloid which garbled it. Another, involving a silver figure on a hill, ended up passing through several press accounts to reach Canada as a blue-caped figure like Superman *flying* over Liverpool! Needless to say, I hoped our investigations would be handled more carefully.

Some well-known cases entered the UFO database as a result of this blitz, including the curiosity at Wylfa Hill near Machynlleth in Wales on 22 July 1975, where a teenager on holiday saw a landed UFO with morphing 'jelly'-like entities inside a transparent dome. When another of these beings floated towards the UFO, the boy fled the scene and tried in vain to drag his father to see. On returning alone, the youth saw the object carrying these beings disappear by pulsing in and out and changing colours rapidly to match those of surrounding sky and grass before 'merging' into them. The teenager suffered from acute shock and what a doctor diagnosed as hysterical blindness in one eye immediately afterwards, and it persisted for months: all rather different from the feel-good approach of the movie and its promotion.

In *Northern UFO News* after the movie went on release I wrote: "For the next six months or so there will hardly be a soul in the UK not talking UFOs. Of course, most of them will not have an inkling what it is really about. Spoonfed on the 'friendly spacemen' innuendoes the media have read into the film, the conviction that UFOs *are* spaceships will be emphasised a thousand times over... It is a pity that this has had to happen now, just as ufologists are beginning to grasp the complexities of this mystery, but it leaves the burden on you all the greater. Our job must be to correct misconceptions and present the public with the reality that lies behind the Hollywood tinsel and gloss."

The magazine had a circulation of about 100, so I doubt it made a scratch in the mass market explosion of publicity, but it shows how the phenomenon is shaped less by what witnesses or researchers think but almost entirely by those who create our perception of truth – the movers and shakers of mass communication.

This was brought home to me one afternoon in the week after the movie opened. I was walking across Manchester when I passed a city centre cinema that was screening *Close Encounters*. I could not believe the size of the crowd outside waiting to get in. Everyone was buzzing about how they had heard it was 'amazing' and the aliens were so 'realistic', so I stopped to listen to what they were saying. One small girl, about six or seven, queueing up with her father to go in to the film, was looking at him inquisitively and her words summed it all up: "Daddy," she asked "What's a close encounter?"

I smiled and walked on. Amidst all the media fanfare presuming the certainty of benign alien visitation, that little girl speaking with the innocence of youth and as yet uncontaminated by cultural forces, had asked the single most important question of all. One we are still trying to answer: what indeed *is* a close encounter?

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VAMPIRIC VAPOURS

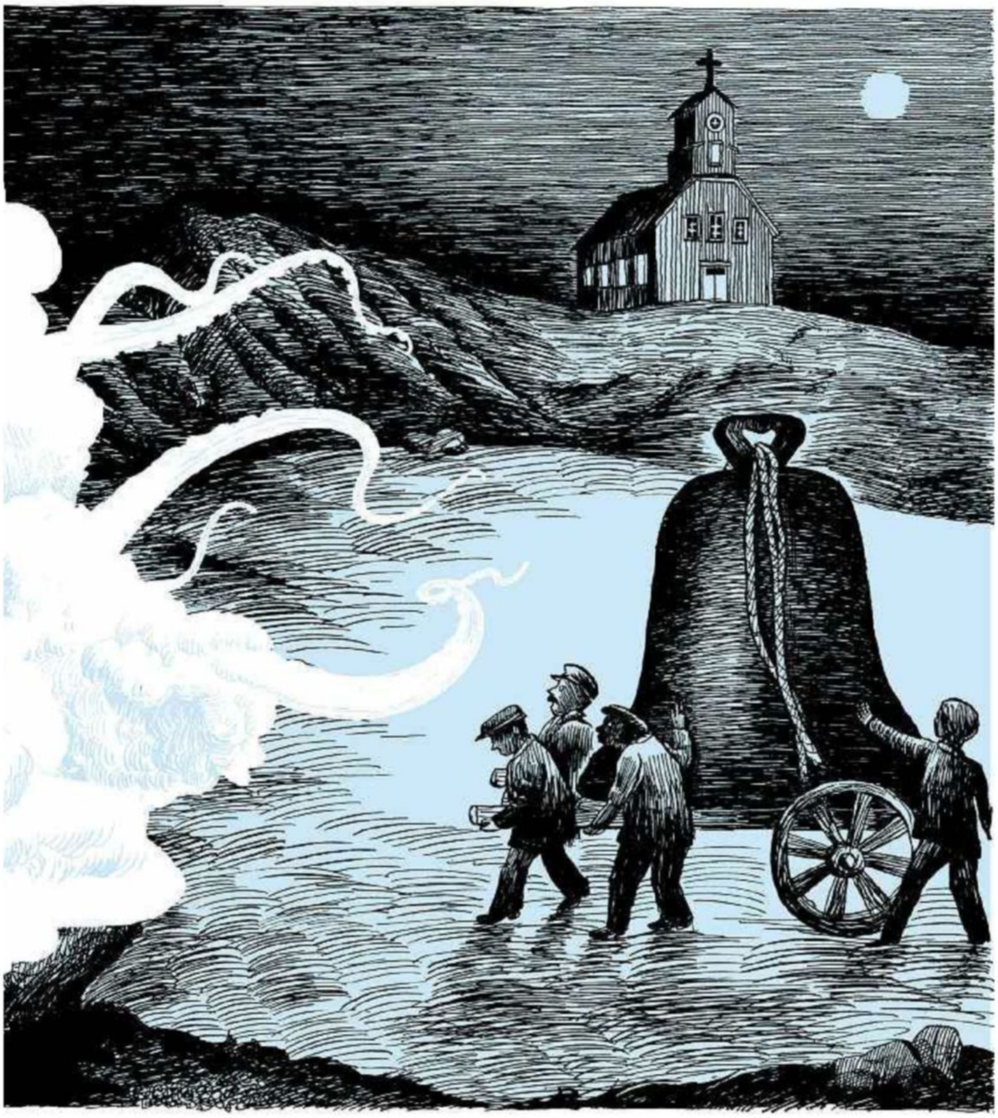
THEO PAIJMANS unearths some distinctly odd cases of monstrous clouds that sap the lifeforce of their victims

On the evening of 29 March 1892, 10 fishermen were preparing themselves for a good night's sleep. It was winter fishing season in Iceland, so the men stayed at the shore near the village of Stokkseyri. The sky was overcast and wind and rain swept over the hut that gave them shelter. Their foreman left around 10pm and the fishermen closed the door behind him. The men went to their bunks and fell asleep – all except two of them. One, Eyjolf Olaffson, would later recount their horrible experiences. While they were lying awake, listening to the wind and rain, they noticed that one of the men was stirring in his sleep, uttering strange sounds.

Olaffson and his friend woke the man up. He told them he had experienced a "most unpleasant sensation". While he was still groping for words, another sleeper began to behave in the same manner, uttering whimpering sounds. The three men who were awake lit a lamp and inspected the cabin, but found nothing out of the ordinary. A fisherman in the bunk opposite Olafsson was helping himself to some tobacco from a snuffbox. Suddenly the man changed colour and his arms fell to his sides. Olaffson sprinted to the man to resuscitate him. After his recovery, the man told how "a terrible heaviness" had come over him, draining all his strength. He became so weak that he could not move but could only make a sound, after which he had become insensible.

All through this night and the next, the fishermen experienced similar, inexplicable disturbances. One of them proposed borrowing the church bell from Stokkseyri to hang in their hut. This they did, and that night their sleep was undisturbed. Believing their ordeal over, they returned the bell; but the thing that disturbed their sleep also returned. The fishermen fled the cabin and took refuge in a nearby farm where their foreman also slept. Nothing troubled them here, but for the next six weeks similar hauntings were reported in various huts around the area.

What stalked the cabins in the area, Olaffson later declared, was also seen by some of his hut-mates. It looked like "a bluish cloud of vapour that moved back and forth and sometimes glowed. Some were also aware of a strange wind, sudden, sharp and chill". Others saw "a thick, bluish cloud, about an ell high", and some fishermen thought they had seen "a lump, about the size of a small



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

The fisherman told how "a terrible heaviness" had come over him, draining all his strength. He became so weak that he could not move and afterwards became insensible...

dog”. It was often seen at the window of the hut, where it looked like “a lump with some sort of tentacles attached to it”. The tentacles would fasten onto the pane, “as if it would get in”.

But what was it? Some fishermen suggested that it was a sea monster or perhaps a ghost that had been inadvertently set free. The local doctor and sheriff investigated; they found nothing, but the hauntings continued. Instead of calling in a pastor, the fishermen turned to old folk wisdom. In the spring, one Eyolf Magnusson visited the nearby hamlet of Eyarbakki. He had a reputation of being able to use ‘words of power’. After some persuasion, he uttered a few verses, banning the tentacled vapour for nine years; it is said that Magnussen did not, or could not, for a reason now lost to us, guarantee a longer period of relief from it.

We do not know if the thing that haunted Stokkseyri returned in 1901. [1] In the 1970s, the descendants of the people in whose lifetimes the hauntings of Stokkseyri had occurred, were still living. [2]

Although rare, there are other accounts of vaporous manifestations with tentacles, prongs or protrusions and which don’t seem to harbour the best intentions. In 1953, Cheshire farmer Herbert Barlow encountered such an entity. The farmer had lost 53 pigs in a fortnight and, a newspaper claimed, five local veterinary surgeons examined the carcasses but were unable to find a reason for this sudden mass death. Two days after the loss of his last pig, Barlow saw in his yard “a large black cloud about seven feet [2m] in height, shapeless except for two prongs sticking out at the back”.

A few days later his wife also saw the cloudlike thing moving about in the yard. But it did not stay there. One night, Barlow found the cloud in their kitchen. Determined to take a closer look he brushed past the cloud to switch on the light. But then the two prongs touched him on the throat. “They felt solid, like blunt sticks,” he later claimed. When he switched on the light, the cloud had gone. Two days later he saw it again. He was letting two dogs out of a shed when they rushed past him, barking frantically. Turning, he saw the cloud at his side: “It moved along the ground with the dogs barking and jumping at it – then rose in the air and vanished.” Barlow never saw the strange cloudlike thing again [3] Interestingly, one of his farmhands, Samuel Jones, lived in the house in Byron Street in Runcorn, that had the year before been plagued for weeks by an annoying poltergeist.

A faint suggestion of poltergeist activity also clings to the strange case of the ‘cloud of smoke’ with two arm-like extensions that nearly choked the life out of Mary Winters. In 1963, the newly divorced Winters had just moved into her new house in Miami – but the omens were not good. The cat was terrified to walk on the plot of land on which the house was built, while inside the dwelling lights would go on and off by themselves and chairs were tipped over by some invisible force. A tree in the yard was struck by lightning. “It didn’t ooze sap, it oozed blood,” Winters remembered.

One night later that year she was preparing for bed at around 11.30. She was sitting on her bed, taking her shoes off. The door of her bedroom was slightly ajar, and the light was on in the hallway. “Suddenly a cloud of smoke seeped into the room and slowly rose to the ceiling. It was like a large, turbulent cloud,” Winters recalled. She jumped into bed and pulled the sheets over her head.

When she peeked out from under the covers, she saw that the cloud was now right over her head and slowly descending. Winters decided to get up, but “suddenly two things like arms on each side came out, and as I started to get out of bed, they grabbed me around the neck. They felt like ice. I was paralysed and could hardly breathe.” She slid towards the floor, with the tentacles still around her neck. While the life drained out of her, she heard a sound: “In a soft, low voice that could have been either a man’s or a woman’s it made a sound like ‘Aaaaaaah’.” The cloud, she said, transmitted the thought to her that her eight-year-old son would be next. That gave her the strength to switch on the light, with the two arm-like protrusions still around her neck. The thing disappeared as soon as the light came on. The whole ordeal had lasted 15 minutes. Winters called a friend, who came over. He saw the cloud as well, when it returned an hour later. The light was switched on and the thing disappeared as before. Winters moved from the house, which was eventually torn down. [4]

These stories of vaporous entities with their roots in folklore exhibit a strange link with the poltergeist tradition[5] and are found in ghostlore as well. A spirit form, “white, cloudlike and shapeless”, was said to have been seen near a church at Stanbridge, Dorsetshire: “This floats along the road for about 200 yards, perches itself on the churchyard wicket, and finally vanishes unaccountably. The same form of apparition troubles Gravel Hill, near Poole.” [6]

Sometime in 1950, a Mr Diprose and his son watched in amazement as a “white, shapeless figure” glided from a field, across the road from Dunstan’s Bridge, into another field. “It always vanished and it doesn’t leave footprints. It’s not just mist or fog, because I’ve usually seen it early on a clear morning.” Mr Diprose added that during the war soldiers who were stationed there refused to use the lane at night. [7]

Such stories of formless, misty apparitions suggest that there may be further undiscovered tales of vampiric vapours that invade the homes of their victims to feast on their life force. And sometimes, these strange clouds even inflict lasting injury. James Ilor was living with his brother-in-law and his family in a house in the town of Kenton, Ohio, in the winter of 1853-1854. The house was haunted in the most undesirable way. So plagued were they by poltergeist phenomena that the family moved out. Perhaps Ilor should have done the same. One night he saw “a white cloud in the loft overhead”. The cloud floated slowly to the north wall and down to the lower floor, when with incredible speed it made towards him. It struck his arm just below the shoulder. “It went through me like lightning where it coloured the skin of my arm and on my body on each side of my arm just like a lightning strike.” [8]

In 1947, Nick Danilatos was awarded more than £800 in damages in a Supreme Court hearing. Danilatos and his wife were travelling by train between Redfern and Newton, Australia, when a white mist broke his arm. Their cabin window was only slightly open. Another train was just passing them when suddenly “something white, transparent and misty like steam” appeared at the carriage window. Danilatos felt a smashing blow to his arm. “I remembered little more until I found myself lying on the seat with my arm broken. I don’t know what hit me. The window was open only a few inches. It was not broken. There were no marks inside the carriage,” he related. His wife had heard a hissing noise and a glimpse of something near the window before her husband fell. During the hearing it was suggested that the thing might have been a “supernatural being”. [9]

NOTES

1 *Ghosts, Witchcraft And The Other World*, Iceland Review Library, 3rd ed. 1981, pp71-75. Olaffson’s account was published in 1956 in an Icelandic folklore anthology.

2 Ibid., p7. As a possible explanation the effects of marsh gas was suggested, see page 91.

3 Philip Paul, ‘The Pigs and the Poltergeist’, *Sunday Graphic*, 27 Dec 1953.

4 Ian Glass, ‘A Cloud of Smoke Grabbed Me… This Is It’, *Miami News*, 30 May 1974.

5 When I discussed the Stokkseyri hauntings with professor Erlendur Haraldsson of the University of Iceland, he pointed out to me that the story was also published in 1964 by Icelandic author Arni Ola, in a book entitled *Reimleikar* (Poltergeists). E-mail conversation with Professor Haraldsson, July 2017.

6 MF Billington, ‘Some Dorsetshire Ghost Stories’, *Cornish Telegraph*, 1 Sept 1883.

7 ‘Country Lane ‘Ghosts’. Heard Footsteps-seen misty figure-soldiers were scared’, *Kent & Sussex Courier*, 24 Feb 1950.

8 ‘They Had to Move’, *Topeka Daily Capital*, Topeka, KS, 16 Jul 1905.

9 ‘No Idea What Hit Him, Got £819 Damages’, *Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, Australia, 20 Mar 1950.

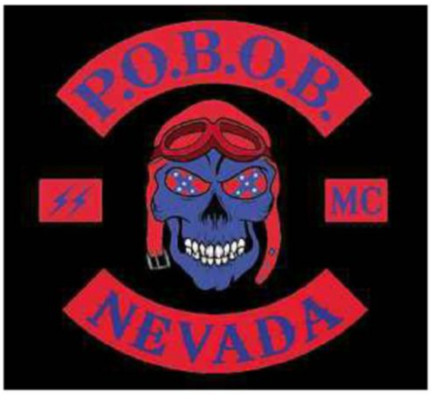
Hell on wheels

Ever since the 'Hollister Riot' of 1947, outlaw motorcycle clubs, with their deliberate cultivation of Satanic iconography, have been a terrifying bogeyman for mainstream society. **STEVE TOASE** explores how films and pulp fiction have exploited these links between biker culture and the occult over the years to produce some cult classics.

The biker subculture has long been known for using occult imagery. From the earliest days, bike clubs used devices and designs intended to annoy the wider community. Some took names to wind up small town America – like the Boozefighters or the Pissed Off Bastards of Bloomington – others achieved the same aims by using symbols rich in darker meanings.

However, there have been times when the occult and supernatural elements within biker culture, and in representations of bikers in fiction and film, have been overt and intentional rather than just a by-product of collective identity or a desire to shock. In addition, because of its inherent dangers, there has always been a thick thread of folklore and superstition running through the biker subculture.

There is a thread of superstition running through the biker subculture



LEFT: *The Wild One* helped cement the image of 'outlaw' bikers terrorising straight society. **BELOW:** The POBOB was one of the first 'One Percenter' clubs.

EVERETT COLLECTION, INC. / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

OUTLAW ORIGINS

The origins of what we think of as biker culture can be found at the end of World War II. Young men came back from the conflict and, finding they couldn't adjust to the boredom and conformity of civilian society, bought cheap motorbikes and started riding in clubs around the countryside. These early clubs were a particular phenomenon on the West Coast, and gained notoriety following events that took place in Hollister, California, in 1947.

Hollister was probably the key moment in the creation of the idea of the biker. On the 4th July weekend of 1947, the town played host to the American Motorcycle Association (AMA) Gypsy Tour Motorcycle Rally. Many more motorcyclists arrived than expected, socialising and drinking, as well as racing. Although there were examples of what today would be called anti-social behaviour (drag racing down the street, pulling wheelies and an arrest for indecent exposure), accounts of events that painted a picture of a town under siege by motorcycling hoodlums were exaggerated and overblown.[1]

Two things led to the notoriety of Hollister. Firstly, *San Francisco Chronicle* photographer Barney Peterson staged a notorious photo, sitting a drunk guy on a bike that wasn't his and placing broken beer bottles around the wheels. Appearing in *Life* magazine, the photo shocked straight America and ramped up the moral outrage.

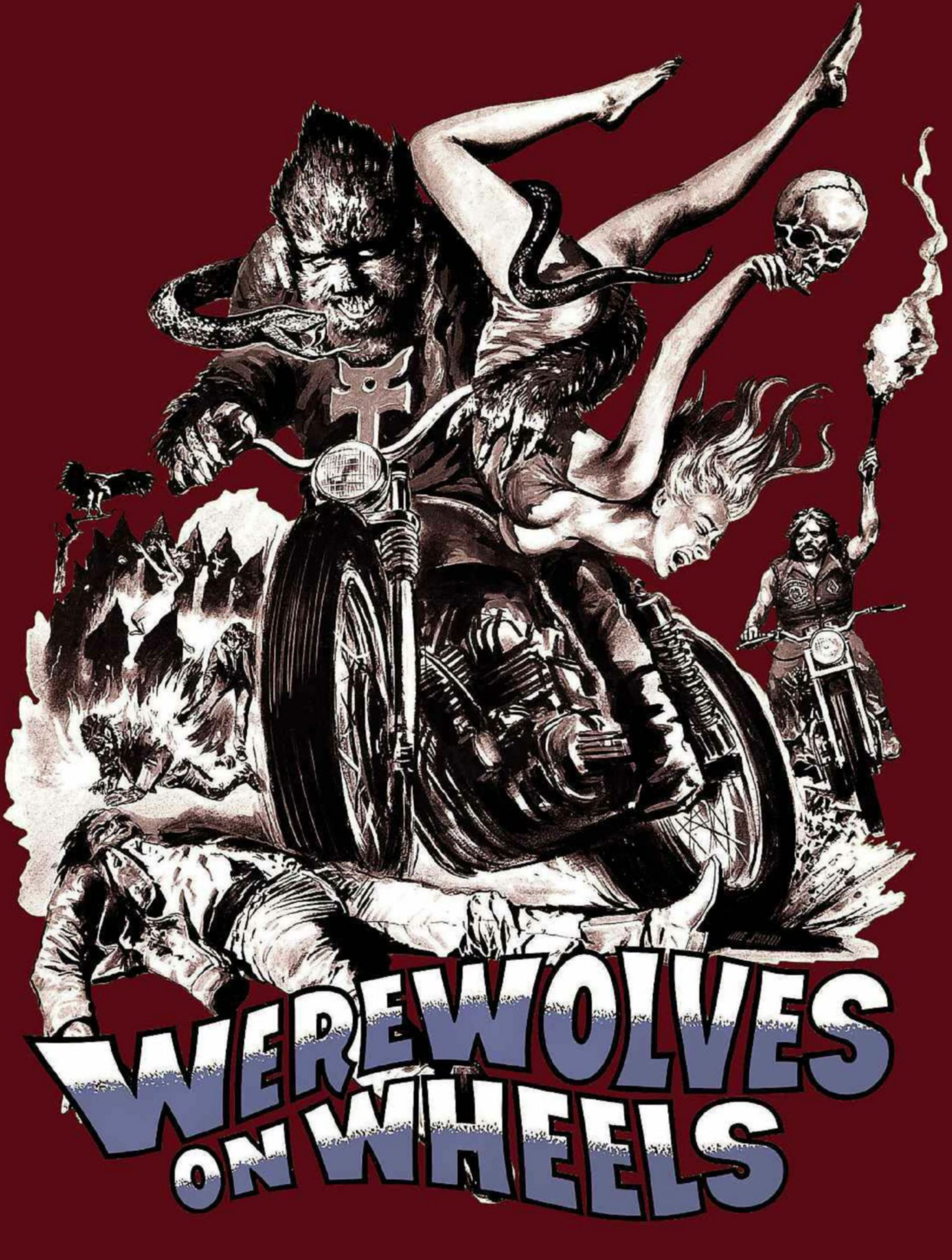
The second was the creation of the 'One Percenter'. The received wisdom is that the AMA released a statement saying that 99 per cent of motorcyclists were law-abiding, with just one per cent causing trouble. The AMA has said that they can find no evidence of such a press release, and the 'One Percenter' idea might be based on comments in a letter sent to *Life* by Paul Brokaw, editor of *The Motorcyclist*.[2] Whatever the origin, the 'One Percenter' label became a badge of honour for outlaw bikers and is still worn proudly by backpatch clubs around the globe. After Hollister (whatever actually happened or didn't happen), 'outlaw' motorcycle clubs not affiliated with the AMA – most famously, of course, the Hell's Angels – spread and established chapters across the US and the modern biker was born.

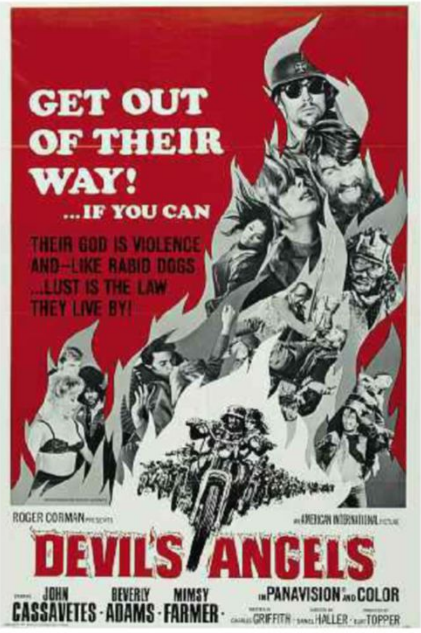
REBELS AND RITUALS

The 'Hollister Riot' was fictionalised in the 1953 Marlon Brando film *The Wild One*, which helped cement the emerging pop-cultural image of outlaw bikers terrorising respectable society.

By the 1960s, biker films became a whole subgenre of their own, largely down to Roger Corman and American International Pictures, who cornered the emerging market in this new type of exploitation movie and spawned legions of imitators. The results ranged from Dennis Hopper's classic *Easy Rider* (1969) to the not-so-classic *Miniskirt Mob* (1968).

At the schlockier (and weirder) end of the scale, *Werewolves on Wheels* (1971) does pretty much what it says on the tin. It starts like many other films of this type, with a backpatch bike club on a run. They are looking cool, and at least one of them is


WEREWOLVES
ON WHEELS


GET OUT
OF THEIR
WAY!
...IF YOU CAN
THEIR GOD IS VIOLENCE
AND–LIKE RABID DOGS
...LUST IS THE LAW
THEY LIVE BY!
ROGER CORMAN PRESENTS
AN AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL PICTURE
DEVIL'S ANGELS
JOHN CASSAVETES · BEVERLY ADAMS · MIMSY FARMER ·
IN PANAVISION AND COLOR
GRIFFITH · HALLER · TOPPER

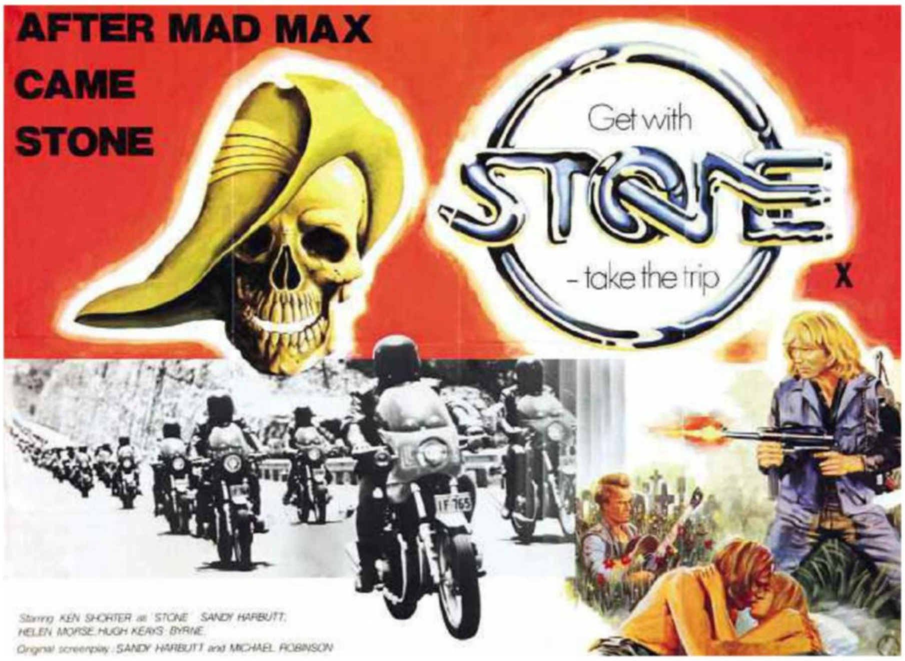
ABOVE LEFT: Satanic imagery was always part and parcel of biker exploitation films. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The occult ritual in *Werewolves on Wheels*.

wearing wacky sunglasses, as they ride down small-town American main streets; there's a quick break by the side of the road to scare some cattle, a brief episode of stunt riding, and a fight with ignorant locals. So far, so standard.

After being mocked for taking life too seriously, Tarot, one of the club members, leads the bikers to an isolated adobe building. Drunk and undisciplined, they are watched from inside by a cloaked figure, whose Satanic brethren surround the bikers and offer them food and drink, which they accept. In the distance, a ritual starts.

While the main focus of the film is the hirsute transformation of the bikers, several folkloric motifs appear. The sharing of bread and wine not only mocks Holy Communion (in the style of Dennis Wheatley), but also taps into traditions of not accepting sustenance from the otherworld (see **FT332:42-47**).[3] The chief Satanist also uses a single hair, with echoes of sympathetic magic. The ritual sequence lasts for a good 11 minutes, and while certainly over-dramatic isn't as trashy as similar scenes in contemporary B-movies.

A Satanic ritual also features in the classic Australian biker film *Stone*, directed by Sandy Harbutt and released in 1974. It's of particular note to fans of the genre for starring Hugh Keays-Byrne – who went on to play axe-wielding motorcycle gang leader Toecutter in the original *Mad Max* (1979), and Immortan Joe in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) – Vincent Gill, who played the Nightrider in *Mad Max*, and a number of Japanese Kawasaki Z1 motorbikes, which also featured heavily in George Miller's renowned series.


AFTER MAD MAX
CAME
STONE
Get with
STONE
– take the trip
X
IF 765
Starring KEN SHORTER as 'STONE' SANDY HARBUTT,
HELEN MORSE, HUGH KEAYS BYRNE
Original screenplay: SANDY HARBUTT and MICHAEL ROBINSON

ABOVE: A poster for the re-release of the 1974 Aussie biker pic *Stone* cheekily – and inaccurately – cashes in on the film's links to the *Mad Max* series – which, in fact, arrived five years after *Stone*.

The story revolves around Toad (Keays-Byrne) witnessing a political assassination, which leads to the members of the Gravediggers bike club being picked off one by one and the eponymous Sydney detective being sent to investigate.

Following the first killing, there is a funeral scene (director Sandy Harbutt recruited real local bike club members to swell the numbers for the shots of the funeral cortège). What's interesting here, though, is the Satanic burial itself.

Informal and short, this couldn't be more different from the extended ritual in *Werewolves on Wheels*, yet in its way the brief invocation and appeal to Satan to look after one of his own feels more natural. While the Satanic element in *Werewolves on Wheels* is there to show the malevolent forces at play, in *Stone* the supposedly Satanic bikers are portrayed as anti-heroes we are supposed to side with rather than root against. Also of note is that the gang's backpatch refers to the Diggers, Australian slang for soldiers, and seems to be referencing the biker subculture's historical links with the military.

BRITISH PSYCHOMANIACS

Moving closer to home, there is another occult biker film that has also achieved cult status. No, not *I Bought a Vampire Motorcycle* (1990), though that has its own charms; I'm talking about the 1973 cult classic *Psychomania*, directed by Don Sharp and released in the US as *Death Wheelers*.

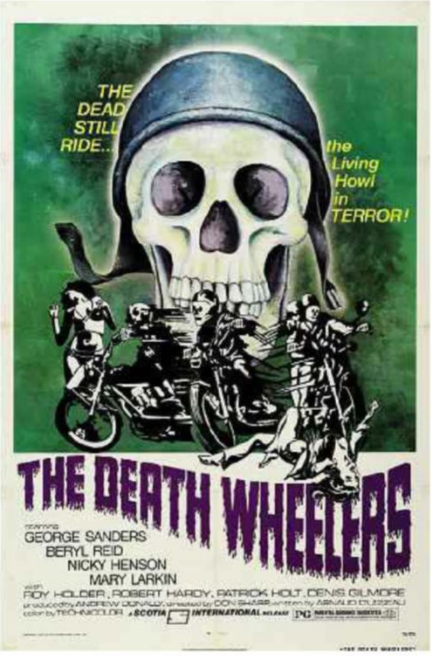
Quintessentially British, *Psychomania* has several elements common to its cousins from across the Atlantic, including scenes of group runs and a ride through a town centre (in this case the now redeveloped Hepworth Way Shopping Centre in Walton-On-Thames) to terrorise the local straights.[4] Beyond the silliness of the skull helmets (probably as much to do with disguising stunt riders as anything else), the film has a genuine folk horror feel. From the opening shots of bikers riding around a mist-shrouded stone circle, to games of chicken on tree-lined country roads, the British countryside plays a major part in creating the film's distinctive atmosphere

Tom (Nicky Henson) is the well-spoken son of Mrs Latham, a medium played by Beryl Reid. He is also the leader of the Living Dead bike gang (lots of foreshadowing there!) and is obsessed with finding out how to return from the dead. After pestering his mother and her sinister butler Shadwell (the great George Sanders in his final role), Tom is given the key to a locked room. Inside, he discovers that the secret of becoming a revenant is to believe at the moment of death that you will return.

During the second half of the film, the club deliberately ride off a bridge to their deaths and then return as – this time literally – the Living Dead (all apart from one who does not believe sufficiently and Abby, Tom's girlfriend, who refuses to take the plunge). The film ends with Shadwell and Mrs Latham intervening to halt the now undead bikers' activities, turning them into standing stones as part of the Seven Witches stone circle.

The film doesn't take itself too seriously, but it's full of interesting elements. One major motif that runs through it is that of the toad. When we first meet Shadwell, Tom has a captive one (described as a *Maximus leopardus*), a gift for his mother. At the end, Shadwell and Tom's mother decide to stop the Living Dead, and she turns into the magical amphibian.

Toads have long been associated with magic and witchcraft. Amphibian familiars are shown in the 16th century pamphlet *A Rehearsall Straung and True*.[5] In 1929, L Kittredge talked about the Devil squatting in churchyards disguised as a toad, waiting to be fed fragments of consecrated wafer by a communicant to whom Satan would gift powers in return.[6]



The turning of sinners into stone circles is also a common aspect of folk belief, reflected in names of sites throughout the British Isles – for example the Merry Maidens in Cornwall, turned to stone for dancing on a Sunday, or the Nine Ladies in Derbyshire.

Broadcast a couple of years before *Pyschomania* in 1971, an episode of the television series *Out of the Unknown* also gave a British twist to the biker mythos. Now unfortunately lost, 'The Chopper' was written by Nigel Kneale and starred Patrick Troughton, Ann Morish and George Sweeney. The plot revolves around a dead biker reluctant to leave the wrecked motorcycle on which he crashed and who manifests to a journalist as the sound of a motorcycle engine.

Very little information about the episode exists apart from a couple of short contemporary articles and some stills (I only found out it existed recently, thanks to Adam Scovell). The use of the term 'chopper' to refer to a custom motorbike is significant, and shows Kneale's awareness of contemporary trends. *Easy Rider* had been released in 1969 and had a huge impact on the UK motorbike scene, with many bikers self-building their own versions using just the limited parts available and their considerable ingenuity. The mangled bike in the 'Chopper' publicity shots is clearly customised (the high apehanger handlebars are a giveaway); perhaps the ghost was unhappy with the standard of work.

PAPERBACK RIDERS

Around the same time, British 'paperback original' publishers New English Library (NEL) began putting out their highly popular

ABOVE: The 1973 British film *Psychomania* (retitled *The Death Wheelers* in the US) is the classic example of the biker movie employing explictly occult themes.

youth subculture novels. Capitalising on their success with the *Skinhead* books, NEL turned their attention to those often seen as the skins' natural enemies in the youth cults of the time: the bikers.

Hunter S Thompson's *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* [7] had made a huge impact, popularising the Californian clubs and in some ways creating a bible that bikers from elsewhere followed verbatim.

Some NEL biker books, such as Jan Hudson's *Sex and Savagery of the Hell's Angels*, [8] tried to emulate the Thompson model, offering an exposé of a hidden and exotic American subculture. Others told lurid tales of violence and debauchery on the streets of Seventies Britain. However, amongst the stories of gang fights, cut brake pipes, and 'showing class', there are some rough diamonds, such as Mick Norman's 'Angel Chronicles' series. [9]

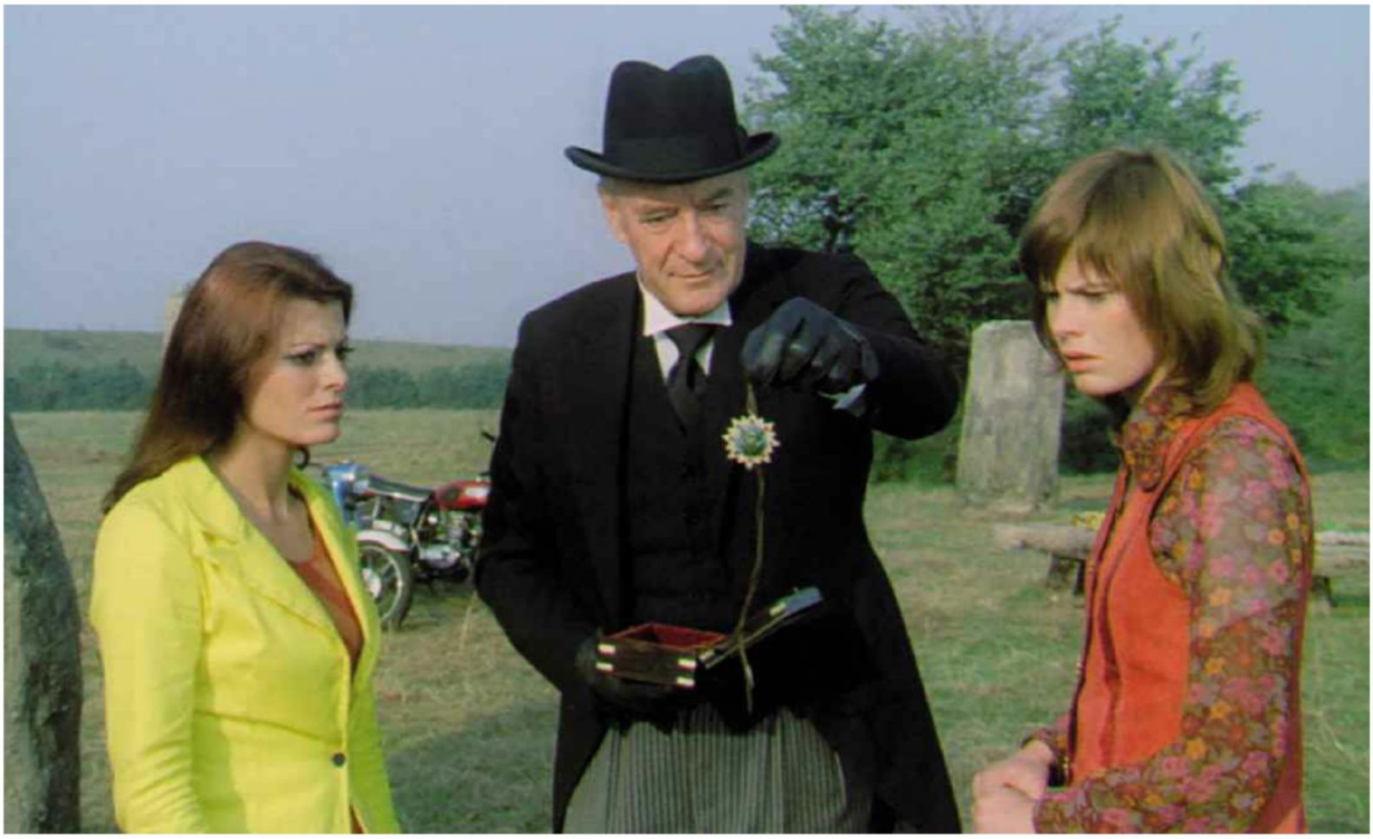
Set in the near future of the 1980s, it tells of a time when Hell's Angels have been driven underground. Over four books – *Angels from Hell* (1973), *Angel Challenge* (1973), *Guardian Angels* (1974), and *Angels on my Mind* (1974) – they fight ultra-violent skinheads called The Skulls, as well as aggressive music fans and rival clubs. These are lurid books, the violence far more visceral than that to be found in many of the other biker titles in the NEL stable, and rather different from more conventional offerings such as Peter Cave's *Chopper: King of the Angels* (1971) or *Speed Freaks* (1973).

Protagonist Gerry Vinson is an ex-soldier, more in line with the historic origins of biker clubs than early Seventies perception of bikers and greasers as purely a youth cult. The books also have an unusual postmodern, self-referential feel to them.[10] In *Guardian Angels*, the third book in the sequence and set in the near-future of the 1980s, characters talk about "old" books published in the 1970s ("they look like the Dead Sea Scrolls. There are pages missing and what's left is held together by glue and tape"), mentioning NEL authors like Mick Norman, Peter Cave and Alex R Stuart by name. It's more than just a clever bit of in-house advertising, and such conceits, placed alongside fictional news reports, extracts from sociology studies, coroner's proceedings and press memos make the Mick Norman books a very different reading experience from their more conventional NEL stablemates.

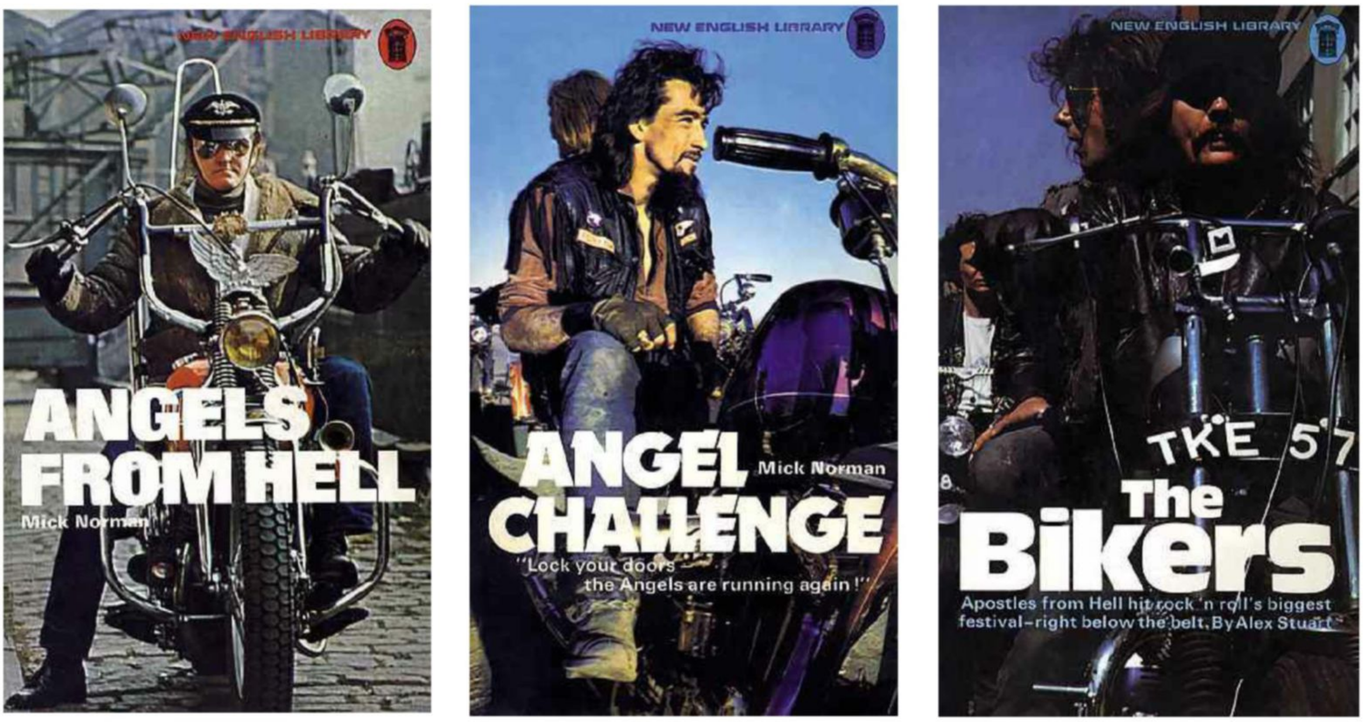
What really makes the books stand out from other biker titles is their imagining of a dystopian future Britain, as can be seen in *Angels from Hell*. The book's climactic fight occurs in a quarry, where many bikers, several innocent victims and over 50 police end up dead. It's stated that none of the wounded bikers live through the morning, though some are alive when the Assistant Chief Constable makes his rounds: the implication is clear. The Prime Minister calls a snap general election to further push his authoritarian and repressive agenda. It backfires, as the country has no stomach for seeing more victims on the evening news, especially as none of the bikers are brought to trial, and the leaders of the Last Heroes chapter escape:

"Sympathy snowballed and the folk-heroes remained hidden. The victims were buried (or cremated). In the grave (or up the chimney) with them plunged the British Labour Party, rending itself to the last. Socialism and Repression both died in that sandy quarry in the early hours of that July morning."

The use of pseudonyms is one of the fascinating aspects of the NEL phenomenon. Many of the consumers who were part of the Skinhead or biker scenes believed that writers like Peter Cave, Alex R Stuart and Richard Allen (the writer of the hugely successful *Skinhead* books) were active members of the subcultures they wrote



TOP: A mangled motorbike in one of the publicity shots for 'Chopper', all that survives of this 1971 episode of *Out of the Unknown* written by Nigel Kneale.
ABOVE: Shadwell (George Sanders) demonstrates the power of the toad to Tom (Nicky Henson) and Abby (Mary Larkin) in *Psychomania*.


NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY
ANGELS FROM HELL
Mick Norman
NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY
ANGEL CHALLENGE
Mick Norman
"Lock your doors the Angels are running again!"
NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY
TKE 57
The Bikers
Apostles from Hell hit rock 'n roll's biggest festival–right below the belt. By Alex Stuart

ABOVE AND BELOW: Mick Norman (in reality Laurence James) and Alex Stuart (Richard Gordon) were two of NEL's most prolific biker novelists.

about and would try and work out who they were. Often, as in the case of middle-aged Canadian writer James Moffat (aka 'Richard Allen' of *Skinhead* fame), they were employed primarily for the speed at which they could turn copy around rather than the high quality of the finished product.[11] 'Mick Norman' was actually Laurence James, a NEL editor and peace-loving hippy, and 'Alex R Stuart' was the Scottish writer Richard Gordon.

As Stuart, Gordon wrote two series of biker books for NEL. The 'Little Billy' trilogy starts with *The Bikers* (1971), about the power struggle between Little Billy, freshly returned from the USA, and Larry the Lamb who has been running the Apostles biker gang in Billy's absence. Whereas Mick Norman's style lies in the interleaving of different narrative elements, the strength of the Alex R Stuart books is in his ability to conjure up an oppressive atmosphere. The events of the first novel culminate at a rock festival, very obviously based on the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival, where bikers pulled down fences and took over security:

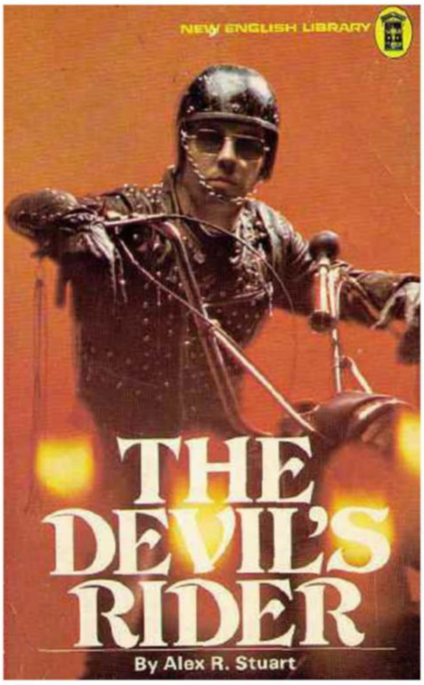
"Dawn.

Bloody red striations staining the eastern sky.

Momentarily there is silence. Not even the birds are making themselves heard. Many people are sleeping out of exhaustion. After the chaotic night. It is not cold, even at this time. There are no clouds in the gradually opening sky. And from the festival there has been no great mass exodus by night. The music has been blasting out for most of the night."

Again, as in the Mick Norman books, there is a concern with government oppression – in this case the use of military intervention to stop the festival.

Sam curses Johnny's Norton, causing him to run over a pedestrian

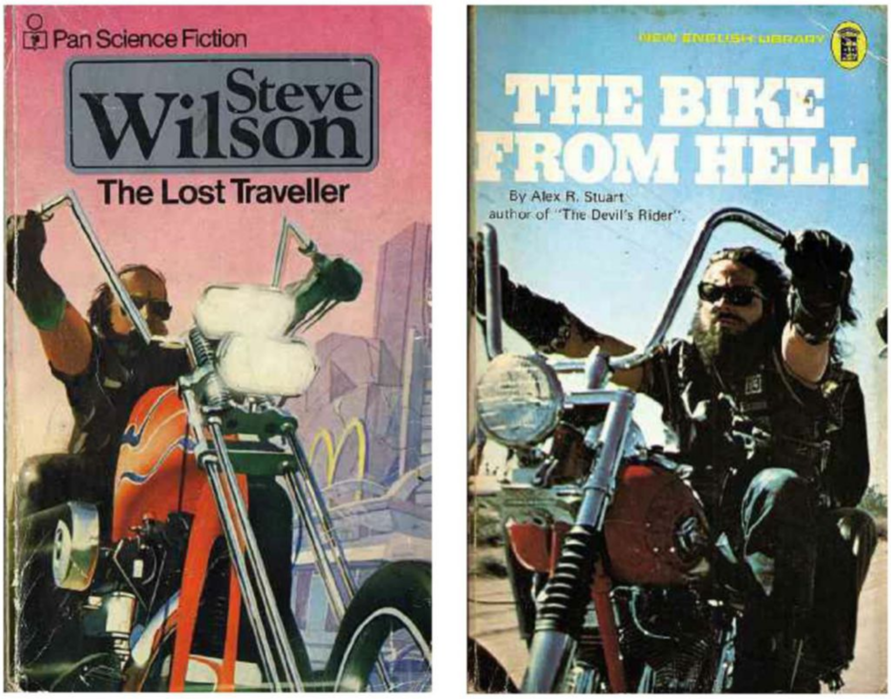


From a fortean point of view, it is the second series of Stuart books that is of particular interest. *The Devil's Rider* (1972) focuses on the Sons of Baal, a bike club led by the charismatic Sam and his lady, Ish. Sam claims he was a priest in the Temple of Nabu at Nineveh in the seventh century BC, and that his partner was a priestess of Ishtar. He also talks about a dimension where all possibilities are realised and everything happens at the same time, and 'The Nine', who are behind everything. There is an admirable attention to detail in much of Gordon's work, and the sections on ancient Assyria and Babylon are quite well researched, with references to Sennacherib, Mushezibmarduk and the ziggurat Etemenanki.

The main narrative focuses on Johnny, who has heard about the Sons of Baal and wants to join, but doesn't quite buy into the more mystical elements. As a result, Sam curses Johnny's customised Norton motorbike, causing him to run over a pedestrian and end up in prison. The Norton kills or injures its next three owners, before Sam buys it back.

The book ends in a climactic scene at Stonehenge, with Sam ascending in violet light… only to return again in the sequel *The Bike From Hell* (1973).

The focus on a hexed motorbike is interesting. Later in life, Richard Gordon moved on from writing pseudonymous youth culture pulps for NEL to more explicitly fortean work. In 1992, under the name Stuart Gordon, he wrote a guide to the paranormal, and in 1995 wrote *The Book of Curses: True Tales of Voodoo, Hoodoo and Hex*.[12] As these were published so long after *The Devil's Rider* and *The Bike From Hell*, it is unclear whether researching the biker books triggered a fascination with hexes, or whether Gordon had used the NEL assignments to explore his own interests. What is clear is that the



ABOVE: Strikingly similar cover concepts for two of the most intriguing biker books of the 1970s.

knowledge behind the fiction went deeper than the throwaway pulp approach of many NEL authors at the time.

A very different sort of book from the NEL paperbacks is Steve Wilson's *The Lost Traveller*. Originally published by Macmillan in 1976, it is set in a post-nuclear holocaust America.[13] The east of the continent is now a police state, while the west barely holds on to civilisation. During the conflict, psychoactive substances are unleashed as weapons – but due to their partying lifestyle, the Hell's Angels take the narcotic effects in their stride. While out on a beer raid they encounter, and rescue, the drug addled President of the United States. This good fortune leads them to becoming a tribal group on the edges of the Fief, an essential part of the defence of the society, but always on the margins: in some ways, this reflects the Prætorian Guard role the counter-culture always had in mind for the bikers.

Full of tribalism, pseudo-Native American spirituality, post-apocalyptic settings and a Grail Quest plot, *The Lost Traveller* is a unique and often overlooked bit of biker fiction, but it effectively captures some of the tensions between civilisation and its subcultural discontents.

BACK STREET HEROES

For a long time, British fans of custom motorbikes had to be content with occasional articles in the mainstream motorcycle press or magazines like *Easyriders* imported from across the Atlantic.

In 1984, this changed with the arrival of *Back Street Heroes*. It was a magazine written very much for the British biker; the 'Back Street Heroes' of its title were the home-grown bike enthusiasts building their own creations in sheds and lock-up garages across the country. From the first issue, Jim Fogg was a key part of the magazine's success.

Archæologist, writer, and biker, Fogg is a bit of a hero of mine. He wrote on many subjects, but it was his fiction that most captured my imagination. Authenticity is an overused word, but there was a sense of clarity and genuine knowledge in his work, and he regularly touched on fortean themes. In *Rat Bike*,[14] the narrator is searching for some bike parts and goes to see Mould, a reclusive magickal practitioner who is hunting the Rat King. *World Enough and Time*[15] is a story about time-slips, while *Gabriel Hounds*[16] features an encounter with the Wild Hunt. Hexed objects feature in Fogg's work too, including cursed archæological finds (as in *Blood Eagle*,[17] which drew on his own experiences on digs) and people who bring bad luck to those around them (*Iron Butterfly*).[18]

One of Jim Fogg's most personal tales was 'The Bridge', about a 1973 encounter with a ghost that prevented him from riding over a damaged bridge.[19] He prefaces it by describing it as a true story; certainly, the area he talks about, near Keasdon and Bentham, is one he was familiar with. He encounters the ghost twice. First, on the moors, the figure steps out, causing him to brake, and then, for a second time, at the bridge. On both occasions, the black-bearded figure is dressed in a heavy old overcoat tied at the waist with rope and wearing some kind of head covering. Later, in about 1979, he sees the same figure in a photo owned by his aunt, and is given a name (Joseph Macbride Camm) and a family connection. Whether or not Jim Fogg really believed the story was true, (he passed away in 1989, so we can no longer ask him), it reads as if it was written with personal conviction.

Some of the works mentioned above were created by people on the outside of biker culture looking in, others by those for whom riding motorbikes was a way of life. Many of these books – even those that were written as pseudonymous schlock fiction – had a huge and lasting influence on the whole subculture,

Maybe it's the risk inherent in being on two wheels, maybe it's the isolation of the biker – even when riding in a pack you're on your own – but I suspect that the recurring theme of curses, whether focused on bikes or their riders, might be down to the vulnerability of motorcyclists and their reliance on the delicate mechanics that keep a bike upright. Whatever the reasons, motorbikes seem to attract more than their fair share of folklore and forteana; and I can't see that changing anytime soon.

NOTES

1 www.salinasramblersmc.org/history/classic_bike_article.htm.

2 Reproduced at: www.ulyssessa.co.za/eastlondon/EastLondonMarch2014.pdf.

3 Thomas the Rhymer, Child Ballad #37. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_the_Rhymer.

4 For *Psychomania* locations, see http://psychomania.bondle.co.uk/.

5 *A Rehearsall Straung and True*: www.bl.uk/collection-items/witchcraft-pamphlet-a-rehearsal-both-strange-and-true-1579.

6 See www.all-creatures.org/articles/rf-toads.html.

7 Hunter S Thompson, *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*, Random House, 1966.

8 Jan Hudson, *The Sex and Savagery of the Hell's Angels*, New English Library, 1972.

9 Mick Norman's original NEL series is collected in the omnibus edition *Angels from Hell: The Angel Chronicles*, Creation Books, 1994. See www.stewarthomesociety.org/interviews/james.htm.

10 See www.trashfiction.co.uk/guardian_angels.html.

11 For an insight into James Moffat's writing style, as well as a good introduction to NEL in the early 1970s, it's well worth tracking down the documentary *Skinhead Farewell*, BBC, 1996.

12 Stuart Gordon, *The Paranormal: An Illustrated Encyclopaedia*, Headline, 1992; *The Book of Curses: True Tales of Voodoo, Hoodoo and Hex*, Headline, 1995.

13 For more on Wilson, see http://andrewdarlington.blogspot.co.uk/2011/11/steve-wilsons-lost-traveller.html.

14 Jim Fogg, 'Rat Bike', *Back Street Heroes* #60, April 1989, pp73-80.

15 Jim Fogg, *Fogg on the Road*, Six Fifty Publications, 1985, pp59-68.

16 Ibid, pp80-90.

17 Jim Fogg, *The Best of Times*, Six Fifty Publications, 1989, pp6-15.

18 Fogg on the Road, pp24-35.

19 *The Best of Times*, pp24-33.

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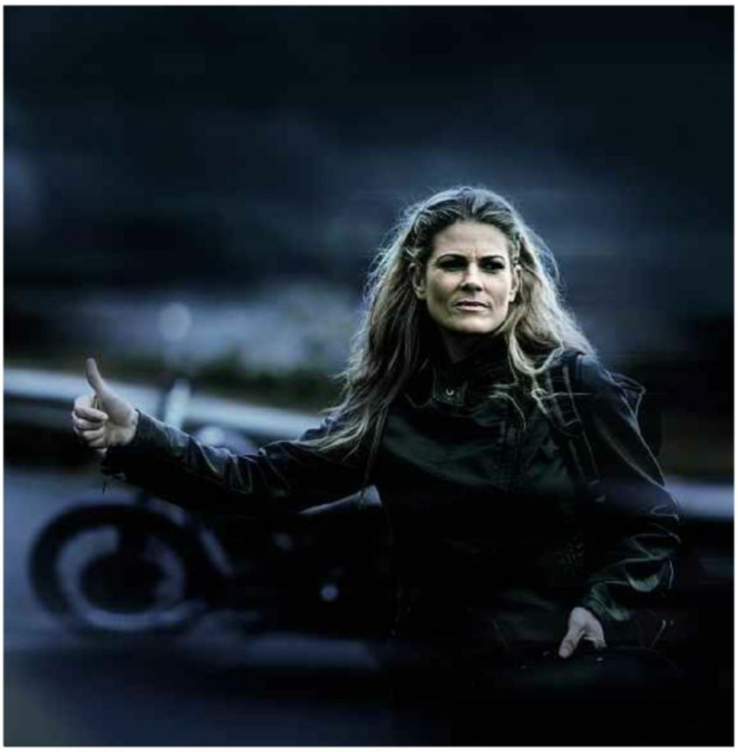
Uneasy riders

ROB GANDY investigates some of the unusual cases in which motorcyclists, rather than drivers, have encountered road ghosts and phantom hitchhikers in that liminal zone between hauntings, local folklore and urban legend.



WESTEND61 GMBH / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

LEFT: Most motorcycle phantom hitchiker stories involve male riders and female hitchers.

Following the publication of my article about phantom hitchhiker reports in West Lancashire (‘The Old Man of Halsall Moss’, **FT328:32-39**) FT’s editor forwarded me an email from Harold Weaver Smith, of Offerton, Greater Manchester, describing his related experience when riding his motorbike along Wellington Road North (A6) into Stockport one night in the late 1980s or early 1990s (see ‘It happened to me’: **FT339:77**). To summarise:

It was late at night, dark and cold, and the road was greasy and treacherous. Harold was tired and concerned about a car moving erratically behind. Entering Mersey Square, he saw what he thought was a female motorcyclist thumbing a lift. He stopped a little way past and turned to her, only to find she had disappeared. Harold didn’t think more about it until a few years later, when reading a book of local ghost stories. One described a motorcyclist picking up a girl hitchhiker of similar appearance in almost the same place. He gave her a lift on his pillion, but on approaching their destination she disappeared. At the house, the elderly couple explain that the only girl of her appearance who had lived there was their daughter… who had died in a motorcycle accident five years previously. They said many young men had had the same experience.

Of course, the story describes the classic phantom hitchhiker urban legend; but the tantalising point is that although both events took place in Mersey Square, Harold had his experience *before* he read the ghost story. I identified a 2005 *Manchester Evening News* article[1] which quoted the ghost story from the *Stockport Express*. The Local Heritage Library in Stockport kindly ascertained that the article was actually published on 30 October 1991’[2] but indicated the event had happened in 1989. In fact, the piece was actually lifted from a story called “The Black Rider” (referring to the hitchhiker’s attire) in a recently published book: *Supernatural Stockport* by Martin G Mills.[3]

The story was as Harold had described, with the vanishing hitchhiker’s destination being given as Hazel Grove, a few miles down the A6. My antennæ twitched when I read that Mills’s source was his *“Shaw Heath informant, Dot, the one who used to work at the Plaza Cinema. Her brother works with a young man, a motorcycle enthusiast, who in 1989 had an experience which was to haunt him day and night thereafter”*. This is the classic friend-of-a-friend link common to urban legends, albeit with names and relationships. Given the circumstances, I adopted a two-pronged investigative approach of seeking further witnesses and chasing Martin Mills to discuss his story and possibly interview his sources.[4] The number of witnesses identified by these efforts was a big fat zero, while efforts to trace Mills only confirmed that he no longer lived in Stockport.

Their daughter had died in a motorcycle five years earlier

I have no doubt Harold’s experience was genuine. What struck me was that he was in a state where his sense of awareness and concentration would have been intensified – it was dark, road conditions were tricky and the car behind was behaving erratically. Perhaps he was taking in more information from the environment than would otherwise have been the case, which might somehow have triggered his experience. But, if so, why did this involve the figure of another motorcyclist, who happened to be female? It’s worth noting that most motorcycle phantom hitchhiker stories (see ‘On your bike!’, p36-37) involve male motorcyclists and female hitchhikers, and that the majority of motorcyclists are men.

Harold himself highlighted that it was only on reading “The Black Rider” years later that his experience even took on a fortean hue. The stated timing of “The Black Rider” event was consistent with Harold’s episode – late 1980s/early 1990s – but I kept asking myself why no one had responded to my appeals for witnesses if so many “young men” had given lifts to the Mersey Square wraith, as suggested in the story. I was left with the suspicion that Mr Mills, also a York ghost tour guide, had picked up on some anecdote or rumour and embellished it for his book by using the standard phantom hitchhiker motif. If so, he won’t have been the first author (or ghost tour guide) to take

FRANKBY CEMETERY

ABOVE LEFT: The junction of Watling Street (A5) and the Fosse Way (B4455) at High Cross, where Peter had his strange encounter.
ABOVE RIGHT: The entrance to Frankby Cemetery: did Michael's ghostly hippy climb over the wall to spook passing travellers?

an urban legend and present it as a genuine local tale.

MOTORCYCLES AND ROAD GHOSTS

Phantom motorcycles are not all that unusual: probably the most famous is that attributed to TE Lawrence, who died following a motorbike accident near his home in Dorset (see **FT328:54-55**). The throaty sound of his beloved Brough Superior is sometimes heard at night, with the noise of the engine stopping abruptly, and always at some distance from the listener. [5] However, motorcycles are very much in the minority when it comes to phantom hitchhiker stories; Gillian Bennett found only two motorcycle crashes identified as the cause of death in the 100 random cases that she analysed. [6] In the 'On your Bike!' section over the page I have set out summaries of cases that I have found, which illustrate the range and consistency of stories, which often overlap considerably with folklore.

Despite disappointment with my Stockport enquiries I was convinced that first- and second-hand experiences of phantom hitchhikers relevant to motorcycles must exist, but given their comparative infrequency I needed to look at a wider canvas. I approached the publication *Motor Cycle News (MCN)* and asked if they would publish a call for testimonies. I received three relevant responses (and another from a medium intimating that such cases involve souls of people who do not realise they are dead and are trapped in a "timeless dreamlike state").

PETER'S STORY

About 10 years ago, Peter was returning home to Lutterworth from Burton-on-Trent, travelling south on the A5, approaching the junction with the B4455 at High Cross in Leicestershire. Students of Roman Britain will know this is where two major Roman roads meet: Watling Street (A5) and the Fosse Way (B4455. The latter continues north towards Leicester as the B4114. At the High Cross junction, the A5 is a section of dual carriageway, straight and level.

It was around 10pm on a warm, clear summer night, and Peter, who was about 60 years old at the time, was travelling at approximately 70mph (112km/h) on his BMW 1100RT. His headlight gave a clear view along the road, and when he was approximately 200 yards from the junction he saw a man with a bag on his back, standing on the grass of the central reservation. He appeared to be waiting to cross the road on which Peter was travelling, but as he was making no attempt to cross, Peter did not slow down.

There is a point where, if an obstruction occurs in a vehicle's path, it is not possible to brake and stop before reaching it. Peter says he must have passed this point when the man stepped forward and began walking slowly across the road. Peter sounded his horn and swerved slightly to avoid the man, which is all that can be done at 70mph. By this time, Peter was almost level with the man and passed to the right of him, close enough to have reached out and touched him. But the man did not hurry, or even look towards Peter, who carried on to Lutterworth, thinking it had been a "near miss", and that both he and the man were very lucky.

The next morning, Peter mentioned the incident to his partner, who informed him he must have seen the High Cross Ghost. She had lived in Lutterworth for a long time, and was aware of other stories of the ghost. Peter says the hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. Reflecting on the incident, he says the man's clothing did not show any particular colour, and he seemed to be grey from head to toe. Peter has travelled the same route many times since, and although always keeping an eye out has never seen this person or apparition again.

I sought references to the High Cross Ghost but only found stories of marching Roman soldiers in the broader area, with their knees below the current road level. [7] I also spoke to a local journalist from the *Lutterworth Mail*, who said the only purported ghost he was aware of was a single Roman soldier that had been seen in the general area rather than the specific spot where Peter's event occurred. There can be little doubt Peter had a genuine experience, which only took on "road ghost" connotations after talking to his partner the next day; it is safe to say that whoever or whatever it was that crossed the A5 in front of Peter that night did not behave in a way that a flesh-and-blood person normally would.

MICHAEL'S STORY

Michael, of Moreton on the Wirral, told me about an experience he had in 1979. He was uncertain about the month, but did not think it too cold because he wasn't wearing a coat over his leather jacket. He was giving a friend a lift home to Newton, near West Kirby, on the pillion of his Honda 400/4. They had been to the Gallery nightclub in Birkenhead, which stayed open until 2am. Michael remembered clearly that he had only had one pint on the night in question.

Between 2.30 and 3am they were travelling along the B5139 through the rural hamlet of Frankby. There was sparse street lighting, and none at all between Frankby and Newton. As they rounded a bend, Michael thought he saw a hippy "draped over" a circular road sign in the glare of his headlight. He was facing towards Michael and away from the sign, with his arms crooked behind him as though clinging to it. He appeared to be over 5ft 10in (1.8m) tall, with long hair, a gangly frame, and a long face. The man was wearing a dark cloth jacket or coat and dark trousers. His legs, like his arms, were bent backwards at the knee, and Michael could see that he was wearing heavy boots. He did not appear to be standing on anything and wasn't moving.

Having passed this "vision", Michael pulled up abruptly. *"Did you see that?"* Michael asked; but needless to say, his mate hadn't. They did a U-turn back to the sign, but there was nothing and nobody there.

They continued to his friend's home, where Michael dropped him off. Michael suggested the sighting must have been an

ON YOUR BIKE!

ROAD GHOST STORIES AND URBAN LEGENDS INVOLVING MOTORCYCLES

Summarised below are 17 phantom hitchhiker/road ghost stories and urban legends involving motorcycles collected from various sources. Special thanks to Alan Murdie, David Clarke and to Jan Harold Brunvand for sharing cases from his own files.

BLACKWALL HORROR

(**FT75:57**, June-July 1994)
Early in 1960, Roy Dent and his new wife were staying at his father-in-law's house in Blackwall Lane, south of the Blackwall Tunnel, which runs under the River Thames. One dark, wet evening the three of them were sitting together when they were startled by screeching tyres and brakes, and then a loud bang. Outside, Roy's father-in-law found the aftermath of a road accident: a motorcyclist had struck the curb on the bend and been thrown against a road sign, killing him instantly. A week later, Roy and his wife were awoken at around 2am by *an identical sequence of sounds*, but on investigating there was no sign of an accident or any vehicle to account for it.

BLACKWALL TUNNEL

(Steve Jones, *London... The Sinister Side*, 1986, p63)
Apparently, in 1972 a motorcyclist dressed in leathers and crash helmet died in a Blackwall Tunnel accident; it is said he is unable to leave. Also in 1972, a motorcyclist picked up a young man thumbing a lift on the south side of the tunnel. Despite the traffic noise the motorcyclist caught the address of his passenger. Emerging on the north side, he looked over his shoulder and found the pillion empty. He turned round and drove back through the tunnel, fearing his passenger had fallen off. However, he found no trace and so the following day went to the given address. On describing the young man he was told he had died some years before.

BRAKE FAILURE (John Harries, *The Ghost Hunter's Road Book*, 1974, p46)
Twelve miles from the Canterbury end of the Pilgrim's Way is the crossroads of the A253 (Ramsgate to Canterbury) and the A266 (going south from Margate). In legend there used to be a burial ground and gibbet nearby. Sinister influences can affect traffic, with drivers unable to steer or brake, sometimes with fatal consequences. One accident was witnessed by a policeman on point duty and an assisting AA patrolman. Both signalled a motorcyclist to stop, who yelled out that he was unable to pull up. He knocked the policeman down, skidded and seriously injured himself. Nothing was wrong with the motorcycle and his speed had not been excessive.

The Kentucky motorcyclist had crashed and passed away in hospital

FORNHAM PARK

(Alan Murdie, *Haunted Bury St Edmunds*, 2006, pp72-73)
In 1979, Mr Boast recalled that in 1946 he had walked one evening with a friend towards a crossroads near Fornham Park, Bury St Edmunds. Both men heard the sound of a motorcycle fast approaching from the direction of Ingham, but could see no lights, machine or rider. The sound ceased suddenly and they had the impression there had been a crash. On reaching the spot they found nothing. Both then recalled that about a year previously a young man riding a motorcycle had been involved in a fatal crash, dying at the spot. Despite being mocked, Mr Boast remained convinced they had heard a re-enactment of the fatal crash, and the sound of a phantom motorcycle.

FOX HOUSE SIDECAR

(http://drdavidclarke.co.uk/urban-legendary/road-ghosts/)
A young courting couple were riding in a motorcycle and sidecar one winter's evening by Fox House Inn, near Hathersage. They pulled over to offer a lift to a girl dressed in motorcycling leathers and crash helmet who appeared by the roadside thumbing a lift. She said nothing, other than to give an address in Sheffield. Reaching the city boundary, with the girl riding pillion, the driver glanced back to find she had vanished. The couple retraced their steps to Fox House but found no trace of the hitchhiker. Concerned, they reported the incident to the police. Resuming their journey, they decided to call at the address the girl had given. The woman who answered the door burst into tears when asked if she knew anyone answering the description. Recovering her composure, she said her daughter had been killed in a motorcycling accident on that very stretch of road. The family had attended her funeral just days before. The description of the daughter exactly matched the girl hitchhiker.

GHOST ROAD, SCUGOG ISLAND, ONTARIO

(www.theparanormalseekers.ca/ghost-road--port-perry.html)
There is a legend that, around 1957, a young man was seeing how fast his motorcycle could go on a straight stretch of an old concession road. But the road was short, and he realised he was running out of space approaching the intersection with the 9th Concession. About 100m (328ft) from the south end he lost control and ploughed into a field, caught himself on a barbed-wire fence, and was decapitated. (Some say he died having banged his head on a rock). This story is supposed to account for reports of a large round white light heading down

the road that, when it passes, turns into a small red light. Occasionally sounds of a motorcycle accompany the light.

INDONESIAN HITCHHIKER
(Letter of 14 Mar 1990 to Jan Harold Brunvand from DH, Australia)
An Indonesian friend-of-a-friend story has been heard from two separate sources, one on Madura and one from Solo, Java. Late at night, a man rode his motorcycle through the countryside towards his parents' home, when he saw a beautiful woman by the road. He stopped and offered her a ride. She got onto the pillion and gave him directions leading off the main road into some rice fields, near a small bamboo house. She then invited him to come with her into the fields where they made love. The man was overcome by sleep and did not wake until the morning, alone. He approached the house to speak with the girl, only to be told that she had died several years before. DH adds pertinent cultural comments: young men in Indonesia nearly always ride motorcycles; Indonesians to a man are afraid of the dark; young Indonesian women would never go out at night alone because of the strict religious nature of the society; and she has never heard of or met a promiscuous Indonesian woman (excluding government sanctioned prostitutes).

KENTUCKY MOTORCYCLIST (*Daily Mail*, 14 July 2016)
A photo supposedly showing the soul of a motorcyclist leaving his body (reproduced on the opposite page) went viral on the Internet. It was taken by a truck driver. The lone motorcyclist had crashed and passed away later in hospital (see **FT347:8**).

MALAYSIAN HITCHHIKER (Email of 3 Feb 1995 to Jan Harold Brunvand from DW)
A Malaysian man was riding his scooter home when a woman flagged him down and asked for a ride. He offered her his jacket because it was cold. On arriving at her home they went in and he was introduced to members of the family. When he arrived home he realised he had forgotten his jacket, and so went to collect it next day. The door was opened by an old lady, but when he asked for the woman by name the old woman raised her voice, saying that the woman died five years previously, and told him where she was buried. He later went to the cemetery where he found the woman's headstone, with his jacket hanging on it. A week later he was killed in an accident.

OLD MAN
(www.paranormaldatabase.com/reports/roaddata.php)
In October 1947, near the A272/A24 junction (Buck Barn crossroads) in Sussex, a man sitting on a stone stood up and walked into the path of an oncoming motorcycle. The motorcyclist felt the impact, but retained his balance and took several seconds to stop and turn back to the scene of the accident. However, the old man had vanished.

PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN, 1979
(Michael Goss, *The Evidence for Phantom Hitch-hikers*, 1984 p12)
Police motorcyclist Mahmood Ali gave a lift to a pretty girl in white who disappeared before reaching her stated destination. A photograph of a 20-year-old victim of a fatal road accident matched the hitchhiker "eyelash by eyelash". Police files were said to hold additional reports of this girl thumbing lifts, but three previous witnesses were said to have been killed looking for the vanished girl, all in collisions with trucks. Ali established that the girl in question had also been killed by a truck when walking along that road in search of her lover. It was supposed that she was continuing to do so, luring unfortunate men to their deaths as a sort of revenge.

SALTAIRE ROUNDABOUT
(Letter of 24 July 1988 to Jan Harold Brunvand from AH, Keighley, Yorkshire)
The following tale was heard in the late 1960s. A young man was returning home by motorcycle to Bradford, Yorkshire, from the Lake District. Around 2am he was about four miles from home, approaching the Saltaire roundabout. He was waved down by a young woman in some distress. She asked him to take her to Bradford. He felt her mount the pillion and rode through the almost deserted streets before stopping to ask her precise destination. Of course, she had disappeared. Fearing she had fallen off, the man rushed to the nearest police station to report what had happened. The desk sergeant calmed him down and said he was just the latest in a long series of motorcyclists who had picked up this phantom at Saltaire Roundabout.

SASSARI, SICILY (1973)
(Michael Goss, *The Evidence for Phantom Hitch-hikers*, 1984, p12)
Noticing the strange coldness of a girl who hitched a ride on his motorcycle, factory worker Luigi Torres lent her his overcoat. On reaching her house he said he would collect it next day. When he called to do so he was shocked to learn she had been dead for three years. On the girl's grave Luigi found both a photo of the hitchhiker he had encountered the night before *and* his overcoat.

TALL BIKER
(www.paranormaldatabase.com/reports/roaddata.php)
On 14 November 2013, on the northbound A15 near the Ruskington turning in Lincolnshire, a driver spotted a tall, black-haired, male figure wearing a leather jacket standing at the roadside. He said the figure appeared out of nowhere and vanished soon after being seen.

UNIONDALE GHOST 1
(Michael Goss, *The Evidence for Phantom Hitch-hikers*, 1984, pp121-125)
Around 9.35pm on 31 March 1978 Corporal Dawie van Jaarsveld of the South African Army was riding his motorcycle on the last leg of a 115-mile (185km) journey, approaching the Barandas turn-off outside Uniondale, South Africa. It was raining, so he stopped to give an attractive brunette a lift, though keeping his wits about him in case she was a decoy for a criminal gang. He handed her his spare crash helmet. Further down the road he felt a bumping sensation and thought he had a flat tyre. When he looked round, his passenger had disappeared. He retraced his journey, slewing the bike from side to side so his headlight scanned the darkness. After a couple of kilometres, the bumping returned; he found it was the spare helmet strapped to the rear seat. Van Jaarsveld went directly to the Petros cafe in Uniondale, where he walked in like the proverbial man who had just seen a ghost.

UNIONDALE GHOST 2
(Cutting from *Albuquerque Journal*, 11 Apr 1980 sent to Jan Harold Brunvand)
In early 1980, 20-year old Andre Coetzee was riding his motorcycle near the Barandas turn-off when he felt his hair stand on end inside his crash helmet and someone, or something, put its arms around his waist from behind. Convinced something was on his bike, he accelerated to 80mph (130km/h) to get away, but the ghost "viciously" hit him three times on the helmet, apparently to make him slow down. When he reached 100mph (160km/h), "the apparition disappeared". Like van Jaarsveld, Coetzee drove to a local cafe for help. The cafe owner said that Coetzee could hardly speak when asked what had happened, and "gradually it dawned on us that the woman ghost had appeared once more.

WILTSHIRE WARNING
(Kathleen Wiltshire, *More Ghosts & Legends of Wiltshire*, 1985, p42)
The road between Calne and Avebury is apparently haunted after dark by a phantom motorcycle. If a car driver sees the motorcycle in his mirror, it is said to warn of an accident to come. This has happened more than once, around 2am. It is not known if a motorcycle was ever involved in an accident there, but several fatalities have occurred along this very stretch of road.

optical illusion, but his friend pointed out that Frankby Cemetery was beyond the wall bordering the road at that point, and that a prankster could have easily climbed back over the wall and hidden after giving a fright to passing road users. Michael took the same route home, looking out for a chortling hippy walking along the otherwise deserted B5139, but there was no sign of anyone.

As with Peter, there can be little doubt that Michael had a genuine experience; but there is little likelihood of someone going to such elaborate lengths to scare passing motorists in such a remote spot at that time of night. Besides, as Michael pulled up very quickly, it left little chance for any prankster to climb back over the wall without being spotted. Although it could have been a trick of the light, Michael was surprised that he saw, and remembered, so much detail about the figure. Therefore, the file must remain open.

CHRIS'S STORY

Chris was a member of a Hertfordshire motorcycle club in the 1960s. Most, if not all, members were in their early 20s. At a monthly meeting (possibly October 1967), a fellow rider told how he had ridden down Roe Green Lane in Hatfield (now the site of Hertfordshire University) at about 11pm one night when his machine misfired. He pulled over to check the bike; but, as he did so, he became aware of an old lady standing in the road looking at him. She was in her 70s or 80s, with short curly hair, dressed in a long overcoat and holding a handbag. The rider was alarmed to see an old lady out on her own in the cold weather so late at night and asked her if she was alright. She stood motionless, saying nothing, and continued to stare at him. He persisted in trying to help, and asked where she lived, to no avail. After a while, the motorcyclist became a bit spooked. He started pushing his machine down the lane, and eventually got it started and rode home.

Most people at the meeting dismissed his tale as a silly "ghost story", except one chap who lived locally and asked for more details of the old lady's appearance. When this information was given, he opened the local newspaper he had with him and displayed the front page, which had a photo of an old lady. "Is that her?" he asked. "Yes," said the rider. "Jesus Christ, that's her!" The headline read "Local resident killed in road accident". Apparently, on the afternoon of the day that the rider had his odd experience, an old lady had wandered into the road at that very same spot and been run over and killed by a car. Unsurprisingly, the club members all assumed the rider had seen the ghost of the poor old lady.

Chris and I agreed the acid test was to find a copy of the local newspaper, the now defunct *Welwyn Times & Hatfield Herald*, with the front page in question. The newspaper had been microfilmed, and is available to view at Welwyn Garden City Library or the Hertfordshire Archives. It had also been indexed on Hertfordshire Names Online, and I undertook a search for "Accident" on the recommended webpage, covering the period 1960-1969 to be on the safe side. From a full list of well over 100 cases, I excluded any that did not even remotely fit Chris's outline description, finally arriving at 10 accidents in the *Welwyn Times & Hatfield Herald* and one in the *Herts & Essex Observer* that sounded relevant from the limited wording provided. I provided Chris with the summaries of these cases, and he forwarded them to his daughter, who still lives in Welwyn. She kindly agreed to pop into the library to investigate further. Unfortunately, she drew a blank. So yet again we are left with a tantalising case. I am confident Chris's recollections are entirely valid, despite the urban legend like 'punchline' to the story, but the potential clincher of the newspaper with the front-page article and photo proves to be elusive.

THE MERSEY TUNNEL PHANTOM

In *The Evidence for Phantom Hitchhikers*, Michael Goss refers to a girl being killed while riding pillion through the Mersey Tunnel and becoming its ghostly hitchhiker in residence.[8] He quotes Ms Theo Brown, folklore recorder for the Devonshire Association, who indicated in 1980 that she first heard the tale about 20 years earlier. Further research identified the following reference to the legend in relation to the Queensway Mersey Tunnel, as described by local author Tom Slemen: "In the 1960s a young woman riding as a pillion passenger on a motorbike in the tunnel fell off and died from her injuries. Not long afterwards the woman's ghost was seen by scores of motorists – and even Tunnel Police – standing in the middle of the road trying to thumb a lift. On many occasions, drivers swerving to avoid the ghost have crashed, sometimes with fatal consequences".[9]

I approached Merseytravel, which is responsible for both Mersey Tunnels – the Queensway (Birkenhead) Tunnel and the Kingsway (Wallasey) Tunnel – asking for details of any pillion passengers who had fallen from a motorbike in the tunnel and died, either on the spot or later from their injuries. I also asked if details might be held of any episodes where Tunnel Police have investigated circumstances similar to those described by Slemen, although I doubted if any would exist.

Merseytravel put me in touch with Peter Bishop, who worked with Mersey Tunnels for 30 years up to 2013, rising from Technician to Acting Assistant Engineering Manager. He explained that *Merseytravel* often pointed people in his direction because he was familiar with the technical aspects and history of the tunnels, as well as the myths, legends and downright mistruths that had circulated over the years. He confirmed any relevant records would be held in the Mersey Tunnels Joint Committee or Tunnel Police record books, but these would have been long since consigned to remote storage or even destroyed.

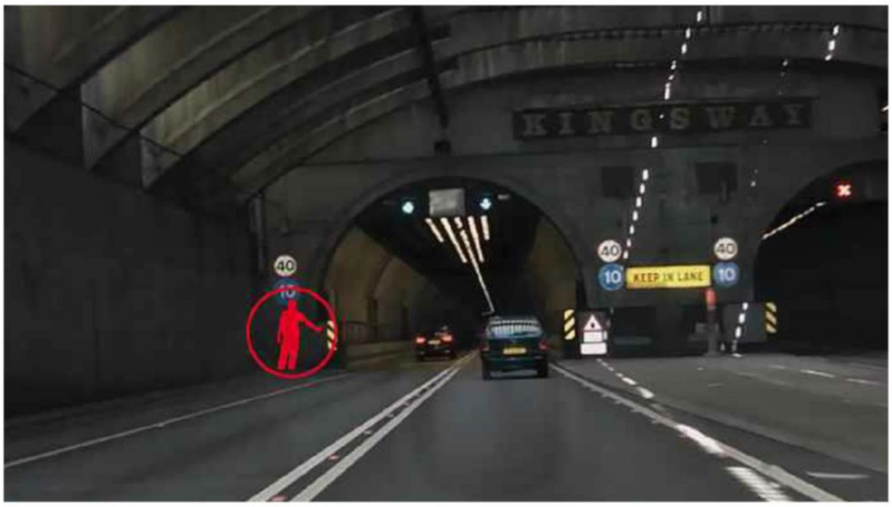
There is indeed a story about the appearance of a young female hitchhiker, but it relates to the Kingsway rather than the Queensway Tunnel. She has been seen standing at the left-hand entrance portal to the south tube of the Tunnel, dressed in black motorcycle leathers, with her arm out, seemingly beckoning passing cars to stop and give her a ride. (The Kingsway Tunnel was opened in 1971 and has two portals, with two parallel running tubes). Described as young and blonde, she is perhaps not unlike Marianne Faithfull in the 1968 British-French film *Girl on a Motorcycle*.

Peter was aware of references to such sightings from comments made by various Tunnel Police officers, but there were two episodes where he had the opportunity to speak to the officers directly involved; these incidents were six to eight years apart, in the 1980s, and involved different officers. One officer was on his own, while the other had a partner with him. In both cases they appeared genuine about their experiences.

The approach to the tunnel portal is about 700 yards long and completely straight, with the last part being under the

Kingsway Tunnel

ABOVE: The long straight approach to the Kingsway Tunnel; why didn't police spot the female figure sooner?



ABOVE: The location of the hitchhiker at the entrance to the Kingsway Tunnel at the Liverpool end.

high, arched canopy. Yet on both occasions the officers only saw the "hitchhiker" at the last moment, immediately to their left, as they drove into the tunnel. She was standing on the hard shoulder in front of the concrete wall, near the steps which lead to the tunnel walkway (which is somewhere no pedestrians, hitchhikers or cyclists are allowed). In both cases the police reacted instantaneously, given their momentum had carried them perhaps 40-50 yards past her: one, heading in the direction of Wallasey in the south tube, immediately turned back via the north tube to the Liverpool portal with the intention of apprehending the girl; on the other occasion, the police vehicle stopped 50 yards inside the south tube, halting the traffic as one officer raced back to speak to her. But on each occasion, by the time officers reached the spot where the hitchhiker had been seen, she had mysteriously vanished.

We should note that it is surprising that the "hitchhiker" was *not* spotted well in advance as the police approached the portal, because being alert for pedestrians trying to enter the tunnels is part and parcel of their duties: it happens nearly every day. In the seven-month period April-October 2015, 153 pedestrian incidents were recorded: 82 in the Queensway Tunnel and 71 in the Kingsway Tunnel. This was broadly consistent with previous figures showing nearly 300 pedestrian incidents a year recorded between 2011 and 2014. A spokesperson said: "The Mersey Tunnels Police always act quickly to apprehend anyone trying to enter the tunnel and an alarm system is in operation to alert of such instances. The police will guide them to safety as one of the many duties that they perform to keep the tunnels operating safely and efficiently." [10]

Peter had heard of similar incidents, including members of the public who had seen the 'hitchhiker' and reported it to the Tunnel Police. However, he observed that the location is (a) very difficult to get to unobserved, and (b) an illogical place to try and thumb a lift; hitchhikers in the tunnel are extremely rare, but would position themselves where they can be well seen by motorists in good time for them to stop. Standing right at the entrance portal means that cars *cannot* stop.

He had heard that not long after the Kingsway Tunnel was opened in 1971 a girl pillion passenger on a motorcycle was killed at that location, but he has never seen any evidence to support this, and he considers the story one of the many myths and legends surrounding the tunnels. He speculated that there might have been some confusion with an actual event from the 1960s, when a motorcyclist came off his bike in the Queensway Tunnel on a bend near the Birkenhead end, hitting the tubular pedestrian guard rails and suffering fatal injuries, but he accepts that this involves a different tunnel and a different sex for the motorcyclist. In any case, he believes any speculation about ghosts in the tunnels somehow causing further fatal accidents to occur is ridiculous.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Phantom hitchhiker/road ghost stories relating to motorcycles form a small subset of the wider phenomenon, and this is as comprehensive a survey as I could put together. With there being two Mersey Tunnel cases, in all I have gathered six first- and second-hand stories (three of each), which is not a bad result.

What should we make of the various testimonies and tales? I am confident of the sincerity of the witnesses who provided testimonies, while the cases collected in the 'On your Bike!' section present something of a curate's egg. Some are strong, others weak; some are clearly friend-of-a-friend stories, and some can be attributed to (mis) perceptions created by environment and circumstances. I am intrigued by the fact that motorcyclists' senses will be constrained by their helmets (which became compulsory in the UK in 1973), goggles or visors, and that pillion riders are usually close up and personal with the rider; a quite different situation to car drivers.

Another thing that strikes me is that several of the cases I have gathered relate to classically liminal places: Mersey Square in Stockport is where the River Mersey begins (at the confluence of the Goyt and Tame), and the bridge on the A6 (which was a Roman road) is therefore the first main crossing point; High Cross is a crossroads of two major Roman roads; and the Mersey Tunnel is obviously adjacent to that river.

On a personal note, I used to live on Wellington Road in Stockport (the location of Harold Weaver Smith's encounter). I later moved to Wallasey on the Wirral and my wife would regularly drop me off at the Liverpool end of the Wallasey, or Kingsway, Tunnel. We were due to move into a house near Newton, before ending up in South Wirral. I recently spotted a local phantom hitchhiker story, in which a "young female has been seen late at night and, on several occasions, has entered the car before disappearing". [11] From the photographs, I realised that this is 250 yards from our house. Looking at the geography of the above motorcycle cases, I wonder if I am hunting road ghosts, or if they are hunting me…

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Peter Bishop and all the people who provided testimonies (together with *Pure Radio*, the *Stockport Express* and *Motor Cycle News* for enabling me to appeal for these), together with staff at Stockport Local Heritage Library for their records search.

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The occult world of Patrick McGoohan

First screened in the wake of the 'summer of love' in 1967, Patrick McGoohan's *The Prisoner* is as relevant now as it was 50 years ago. Packed with allusions to the Illuminati, the police state, brainwashing, and hidden influences on society, it is a text that is still being unpacked five decades on. **BRIAN J ROBB** opens a window on the secret world of Patrick McGoohan.

Given that Patrick McGoohan's short-lived 1967 British television series *The Prisoner* remains as weird and off-the-wall when viewed today as when it was first broadcast 50 years ago, it can clearly hold its own against offbeat contemporary delights such as the revived *Twin Peaks* and the superhero show *Legion*. Debate continues as to what it all meant. Viewers were furious with a final episode, 'Fall Out' (broadcast in February 1968), that pointedly refused to answer questions that had been building across the series's 17 episodes. Instead, the finale – produced quickly and under pressure by McGoohan – presented a whole new set of enigmas that 1960s audiences simply weren't ready for.

The primary source for *The Prisoner* was the mind of co-creator and star Patrick McGoohan. His unique view of the world and how it works informed the stories he wanted to tell and the style in which he wanted to tell them, packing the episodes with fortean notions. Born in New York in March 1928, McGoohan was largely raised in Ireland and Sheffield. An evacuee during the war, he quit school at the age of 16, becoming a stage manager at Sheffield Repertory Theatre after trying his hand at a variety of jobs. When an actor fell ill, he stepped into the vacant role and by the mid-1950s was pursuing an acting career in his own right.

LEFT: Patrick McGoohan as secret agent John Drake in *Danger Man*. **FACING PAGE:** McGoohan in *The Prisoner*.

COURTESY OF ITV

> *The short-lived series remains as weird and off-the-wall as when it was first broadcast 50 years ago*

McGoohan's screen life began when he was a contract player for the influential Rank Organisation, playing 'bad boy' characters in 1950s films like *Hell Drivers* and *The Gypsy and the Gentlemen*. In a sign of things to come, McGoohan clashed with Rank executives and his contract was soon torn up. Television offered both regular employment and a relatively fresh medium in which he could flex his creative muscles. Hired by mogul Lew Grade, he took on the lead role in *Danger Man*, a spy series initially made up of 30-minute episodes in which his character of John Drake used brains rather than brawn to solve problems. Raised a Catholic (at one point, he was on course to train as a priest) and rather puritanical, McGoohan insisted on there being no 'romance of the week' for Drake; these concerns would also lead McGoohan to turn down the role of James Bond in *Dr No* (1962) on 'moral' grounds.

Created by Australian writer and producer Ralph Smart, *Danger Man* was unashamedly designed for export to the US (as most of Lew Grade's ITC shows were) and had an internationalist outlook, with stories taking place all around the world, often in fictitious, vaguely 'foreign' states. The first episode, 'A View from a Villa', was set partly in an Italian village, so second unit director John Schlesinger (*Midnight Cowboy*, *Sunday Bloody Sunday*) shot in Portmeirion, a picturesque, Italianate Welsh location that stuck in McGoohan's mind. A further five episodes of the series's first year either filmed in Portmerion or featured brief footage of the distinctive 'village'.

Although fairly successful, the initial incarnation of *Danger Man* lasted just one season. It was revived, again with McGoohan in the lead, two years later after the success of the first Bond movie had created a vogue for all things

espionage. Also in the cultural and political background were the tensions of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the assassination of JFK, and the arrival of other pop culture spy television series like *The Saint*, *The Avengers*, and *The Man From UNCLE*. The revived *Danger Man*, now with hour-long episodes, was a hit, running for four seasons (with the final two episodes in colour). McGoohan, always restless, felt the format had been played out and he quit the show, forcing its cancellation. He had a new series in mind, one about a secret agent who mysteriously resigns and finds himself trapped in a strange prison…

BECOMING NUMBER 6

Patrick McGoohan attributed the origins of The Prisoner to "boredom… boredom with television". Tired of the grind on *Danger Man*, he went to Lew Grade with a new concept about a secret agent imprisoned against his will in a mysterious Village, to be shot in Portmeirion. Grade heard a verbal pitch from McGoohan, and professed not to understand a word of it. However, recognising his star's hard-won status, Grade agreed to finance what was initially intended to be a short-run of just seven episodes.

Along with producer David Tomblin and script editor (and former spy) George Markstein, McGoohan crafted a series that would by turns engage and then enrage the ITV audience who first viewed it from September 1967 to February 1968, for a total of 17 episodes (after Grade put pressure on McGoohan to extend the series to a more traditional length).

Whatever else it might have been, the show was distinctly McGoohan's: he wrote three episodes (one under the name 'Paddy Fitz') and directed five (two under the telling name 'Joseph Serf'). He was a hard taskmaster, by all accounts, during the fraught production, insisting on having things precisely as he envisioned them and parting ways with collaborators who weren't on board with his distinctive vision. With *The Prisoner*, McGoohan had a message he wanted the world to hear: the question was, would anyone watching understand it?

From its very opening, *The Prisoner* raises questions of identity. The title sequence sees McGoohan's character angrily resigning, his image deleted with a series of Xs across a photograph, before a hearse pulls up outside his house and debilitating gas is pumped in. McGoohan's character symbolically 'dies', only to 'awaken' in the new world of the Village, a very Gnostic notion.

Is McGoohan's new character – referred to throughout only as Number 6 – really John Drake of *Danger Man*? There is evidence in the series to back this up: in the episode 'The Girl Who Was Death' (a storyline planned for *Danger Man*), Number 6 meets Potter, who'd previously been Drake's contact and was played by Christopher Benjamin in both shows. Despite this, in a 1985 interview McGoohan denied Number 6 and John Drake were one and the same – but he would say that, wouldn't he?

Central to *The Prisoner* are questions of free will, individual freedom, and state control. The Village depicts a world very similar to that we live in today, where those in charge (Number 2 and his staff) have access to files covering every aspect of their citizen's lives, where constant surveillance is maintained, where the population is controlled through manipulation of the media, and dissent is suppressed. One of the mottos of the Village is 'Questions are a burden for others; answers a prison for oneself'. Each episode opened with Number 6 declaring "I am not a number, I am a free man", despite all the evidence to the contrary.

WE ARE ALL PRISONERS

So, where did all this come from? McGoohan was clearly an individualist with a strong moral code, a man who stuck to his principles even when it damaged his career; that much is clear. The story he wanted to tell in *The Prisoner* sprang directly from his own concerns with the world he saw developing in the mid-20th century. In an

COURTESY OF ITV

ABOVE: McGoohan's Number 6 is stripped of individual identity and repeatedly coerced into accepting the norms of society represented by The Village.

interview, he explained: "We're run by the Pentagon, we're run by Madison Avenue, we're run by television, and as long as we accept those things and don't revolt we'll have to go along with the stream to the eventual avalanche... As long as we go out and buy stuff, we're at their mercy. We all live in a little "Village". Your Village may be different from other people's Villages, but we are all prisoners."

This state, of being imprisoned while living in an apparent democracy, was at the heart of *The Prisoner*. It is also central to much occult thinking, especially Gnosticism. Pre-Christian Gnosis is taken to mean gaining (often secret) knowledge through personal experience or perception of the 'divine spark' located within the human mind. The series is packed with Gnostic notions, hidden meanings, secret messages, and other occult symbolism that can be decoded by a perceptive viewer who has the time and patience to tease out the esoteric meanings of the text. There are simply too many interpretations to itemise here, but here are some central concepts:

CONFORMITY: The central thread of *The Prisoner* is the attempt by a series of 'new' Number 2s to break Number 6, to get him to reveal the reason he resigned and to have him submit to the society of the Village and the control of Number 1. This is a model of society as a whole, as perceived by McGoohan: society demands (and rewards) conformity on its own terms; anything else is seen counter to 'the way things are' (the dominant ideology) and is deemed illegal or unorthodox. Anyone who resists this conformity is declared 'unmutual' and denied participation in the rewards of society. Disharmony will not be tolerated.

INDIVIDUALISM: Arriving in the Village, McGoohan's character is stripped of all individual identity: his name is taken away, and he is given the same 'uniform' as the other inhabitants. This breaking down of identity is the first step to enforcing conformity, and is used in state-supported torture. In the episode 'Once Upon a Time', Number 6 repeatedly denies being a 'unit' of the Village and so of society. He is 'not a number' but a 'free man'. The series follows Number 6's ongoing struggle to retain his own identity in the face of overwhelming opposition and attempts to remake him become as the Village controllers want him to be.

SECRET RULERS: In the context of *The Prisoner*, the 'secret rulers' of the world might be thought of in modern parlance as the New World Order. The Village as a microcosm of New World Order society is reflected in the never-seen Number 1 and the constantly changing Number 2. While Number 2 is nominally in charge (like the various presidents and prime ministers of individual countries), they are all controlled in turn by the seemingly absent or invisible Number 1, the true power behind the scenes (take your pick: Bilderbergers, the Illuminati, the Freemasons, or the aliens). While Number 1 remains constant, the face of Number 2 changes (played variously in the series by Patrick Cargill, Kenneth Griffith, Leo McKern, and Mary Morris, among several others). The real power remains hidden.

ABOVE: In the episode 'Free for All', democracy is revealed as a stage-managed deception.

The series is packed with Gnostic notions and hidden meanings

CONTROL: The series concerned itself with brainwashing and mind control; several episodes featured drugs as a measure of mental control ('A Change of Mind'; 'A, B, & C'). The Village is a simulacrum of reality, a 'test tube' in which behavioural conditioning can be tried out (primarily to break Number 6) and psychological warfare operations can be practised before being utilised on a wider stage. Even the private dream world of Number 6 is not safe from state surveillance, as in the episode 'A, B, & C' where he is placed in a drug-induced dream state in the hope that it can be discovered if he sold state secrets to a foreign power prior to his resignation.

SURVEILLANCE: Everyone in the Village is under constant observation. The 'all seeing eye' appears in various places throughout the series, but is most notable in the Control Room, where an eye-shaped camera roams across the set, which is divided between a map of the world and a map of the stars reflecting the two pillars of the Masonic lodge: the Earth and the Sky. The show depicts a Panopticon-like society, a police state driven by constant surveillance and controlled through martial force (the 'Rover' balloon that captures runaways).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ITV

ABOVE AND BELOW: Sir Clough Wiliam-Ellis's Italianate folly on the Welsh coast, built between 1925 and 1975, proved the perfect setting for the 'The Village': bizarre, hermetic and strangely post-modern.

DEMOCRACY: Elections are spoofed in the episode 'Free for All' in which Number 6 stands against Number 2 in the annual Village election. Made and broadcast in a UK election year, the episode saw McGoohan questioning the legitimacy of the democratic process. Is it all nothing more than a game to keep the populace feeling involved in wider events? After all, no matter how you vote, the politicians always win. Village democracy is revealed to be a stage-managed pretence, with a manipulated electorate, and even when Number 6 ultimately wins, he also loses. This was the first of several scripts McGoohan himself wrote, revealing his preoccupations.

SECRETS: *The Prisoner* is full of secrets, as is Number 6 himself. Is he really John Drake? Is he, as the exchange played at the opening of each episode seemingly reveals, really the elusive Number 1? ("Who is Number 1?" "You are, Number 6'") Just why did he resign? Who operates the Village – 'our' side, or 'theirs'? Secrecy is the power gained through control over information. Again, the opening reveals the series's main concern: "What do you want?" "Information!" "You won't get it!" McGoohan's series is a commentary on the corrosive nature of secrets, especially at state level, and its detrimental effects on human relationships, both personal and social.

FALSE FLAG OPERATIONS: As with the rigged election in 'Free for All', the assassination plot of 'It's Your Funeral', in which Number 6 is implicated, is an internal operation intended to replace Number 2 with a younger man. The political assassinations of the early-1960s, especially that of JFK, inspired McGoohan to look behind the curtain, to ask the question *Cui Bono*: Who Benefits? Conspiracy is to the fore here, and in several episodes either Number 2 or the Village 'system' are shown to have been manipulating events (as in 'Hammer into Anvil', for example), putting themselves in a 'never lose' situation.
In the episode 'The Chimes of Big Ben', Number 2 and Number 6 discuss control system paradigms, while other episodes explore the nature of reality. Is 'The Girl Who Was Death' really just a children's fairy story? Are the Western-set events of 'Living in Harmony' really the result of a hallucinogenic trip? Or are both forms of alternative or virtual reality?

> *"With an excess of freedom we will ultimately destroy ourselves"*

CLASS: A very British preoccupation, questions of class permeate *The Prisoner*, from the upper-class register of the speech of many of the 'inhabitants' of the Village, to the redefinition of the sources of power from upper class and working class to jailer and prisoner. Despite being part of the Establishment, as a former secret agent, Number 6 seems to come from a working class background: he is simply not 'one of the chaps'. They are the ones who run things, the Number 2s of the Village. The new location Number 6 inhabits is simply a distorted, even satirical, version of the class-ridden world he attempted to leave behind.

DRUGS: Although much of *The Prisoner* seems to embody elements of the 1960s counter-cultural movements that surrounded its creation, McGoohan's upbringing gave him a hardline view on drugs: they are not a

BRUNO VINCENT / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: *Prisoner* fans re-enact the election in 'Free for All' on the show's 40th anniversary celebrations in Portmeirion in 2007.

way to access other states of consciousness (as advocated by writers such as Ken Kesey), but are instead a detriment to the individual, yet another method of social control aimed at keeping a potentially disruptive population pacified. McGoohan's own sincerely held beliefs trumped those of the people to whom his fight for the individual against those who would control society might otherwise appeal. Indeed, being older than most of its participants, McGoohan was a vocal opponent of what was known at the time as the 'permissive society', whether that be in matters of drugs or sex and sexuality. This was just one of many dichotomies from which *The Prisoner* was built. "I believe," said McGoohan, "[that] the inherent danger is that with an excess of freedom we will ultimately destroy ourselves." One key, perhaps, to the puzzle of *The Prisoner* is that the show and its creator railed equally against authoritarianism and anarchy…

NUMBERS: The main characters of *The Prisoner* are Number 1 (never seen, until the end), Number 2, and Number 6. The hierarchical meanings are clear enough, however in the final episode 'Fall Out' (warning: major spoiler for a 50-year-old TV show coming up…) it is revealed that Number 6 is, in fact, also Number 1. The hidden controller of this world is a mere reflection of the tortured main character (or vice versa), the man in control being simply another aspect of the imprisoned one. Said McGoohan of this controversial conclusion: "If there are answers, they are contained in the last episode. Number 1, the horror figure hanging over it all, is revealed as the Prisoner [Number 6] himself. He tears off a mask – the face of an ape – revealing the bestial self which has been his greatest enemy." He also stated: "This overriding, evil force is at its most powerful within ourselves and we have constantly to fight it and that is why I made Number 1 an image of Number 6. His other half, his alter ego." That's all clear, then…

ESCAPING THE VILLAGE

Patrick McGoohan always refused to 'explain' *The Prisoner*, believing that to do so would somehow diminish the show's power. At the very least, if he had put a definitive explanation on the events of the series, he would have shut down many fruitful and enjoyable avenues of exploration. However, looking at some of the things he did say about the show over the years, it is possible to discern some idea of what its driving force thought *The Prisoner* was all about.

As *Wired* noted at the time of McGoohan's death in 2009: "From technological nightmares of surveillance and murderous inventions like the balloon Rovers to brain transplants and *Clockwork Orange*-like torture, *The Prisoner* challenged viewer expectation and experience with every episode." The show was essentially an allegory of the individual, whom McGoohan personified as 'everyman' (the name of his production company that made *The Prisoner* was Everyman Films) seeking peace and freedom in a dystopia that had disguised itself as a utopia. McGoohan once explained: "I must have individuality in everything I do. It's not easy to find it always. I question everything. I don't accept anything on face value." Clearly, his message was that neither should we.

In a 1990 Radio One interview with Simon Bates, McGoohan further explained that "the Prisoner never escapes… everyone is a prisoner of something. You escape when you're released, I suppose, by death. It's the final release, and as to how and where you go and what [happens] thereafter depends on what sort of prisoner you were. You can be a prisoner and free, at least temporarily."

In 1984, McGoohan said of his controversial work: "If I could do it again, I would. As long as people feel something, that's the great thing. It's when they are walking around not thinking and not feeling, that's tough. When you get a mob like that, you can turn them into the sort of gang that Hitler had." Fifty years on from the debut of *The Prisoner*, McGoohan's words and work are just as relevant today, in the era of Trump and 'fake news', as they have ever been. Be seeing you…

BRIAN J ROBB is a regular contributor to FT and the author of books on silent film, superheroes, Steampunk and Philip K Dick.

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Poison sausages and platypus venom

MARK GREENER looks at the weird history of poisons turned medicines

When researchers develop new medicines, eye of newt, adder's fork and blindworm's sting don't come close. Drugs based on venoms, toxins and poisonous blood sausages are medical mainstays. Now, the venom from a creature that 18th century naturalists believed was a hoax might lead to new treatments for a common, deadly disease.

We'll begin in 1793 in the village of Wildbad, southwest Germany, where 13 people fell ill after eating blood sausage. Six died. Blood sausages caused several other outbreaks of fatal food poisoning around the same time; so between 1817 and 1820 the German doctor and poet Justinus Kerner investigated a 'fat poison' he extracted from 'sour' sausages. Despite killing several animals with the extract, he tested the 'fat poison' on himself. A few drops on the tongue caused marked drying of Kerner's mouth and throat. In 1869, John Müller, another German physician, coined the name botulism, from *botulus*, the Latin for sausage. We now know that botulinum toxin kills by excessively relaxing and paralysing muscles; but in tiny doses, it is invaluable for treating, among other conditions, spasticity, excessive sweating, chronic migraine, bladder problems and, of course, reducing the appearance of wrinkles. Yet just a gram of inhaled crystalline botulinum toxin would kill more than one million people.

Botulinum toxin isn't an isolated example of a poison turned medicine. In the 1970s, researchers discovered that extracts of the venom of the Brazilian pit viper (*Bothrops jararaca*) inhibited angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE), a protein that helps control blood pressure. The discovery led to the development of captopril, the first of a now widely used group of drugs called ACE inhibitors. More recently, a toxin from a marine cone snail – which fires a venom-laden harpoon at its prey – led to ziconotide, which often alleviates otherwise intractable pain.

The platypus sank its spurs into his right arm and held on

Meanwhile, drugs based on venoms from other species help treat diabetes, which causes about 24,000 premature deaths each year in England alone. Insulin isn't the only hormone that controls blood sugar levels. Your gut, for example, produces a protein called glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) that has several anti-diabetes actions. However, GLP-1 is rapidly broken down: about half the amount in the blood is gone in just two minutes or so. This short action means that human GLP-1 isn't any use as a drug for diabetes. Then, in the early 1990s, researchers extracted a protein called exendin-4 from the venom of the Gila monster (*Heloderma suspectum*). Exendin-4 triggers the same biological pathways as GLP-1. But the sequence differs. Human GLP-1 is usually 30 amino acids long. Amino acids are, of course, the building blocks of protein. Imagine sticking 30 bricks together: that's human GLP-1. Now switch 15 bricks. That's how much exendin-4 differs: half its amino acids are different from human GLP-1. The differences make exendin-4 resistant to DPP-4. So, it's broken down much more slowly and the person with diabetes benefits for longer. Exenatide – synthetic exendin-4 – is now a mainstay of diabetes treatment. But it's not the only unusual potential source of new diabetes treatments. A recent study suggests that future drugs for diabetes might trace their heritage to venom from the duck billed platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*).

When a dried platypus arrived in London in 1799, the eminent naturalist George Shaw wondered if it was a "colonial prank". After all, Asian taxidermists regularly stitched the head and trunk of a monkey to a fish tail to create a 'mermaid'. There are, however, three families of living monotremes; the long- and short-beaked echidnas and the platypus. In common with reptiles, amphibians and birds, but unlike most mammals, the alimentary and reproductive tracts share an exit – thus the name monotreme, from the Greek for one hole. Monotremes also lay eggs, which pass through the same opening as urine and fæces. The male platypus has a sharp spur in the ankle of its hind legs connected to a venom gland behind the knee. Some fossil mammals from the Mesozoic (252 to 66 million years ago) have similar structures. Such characteristics led some authors to describe monotremes as primitive. Yet they are remarkable survivors and masters of their environmental niches. After all, an ancestor of today's monotremes lived in Argentina, just after the demise of the dinosaurs, and they are still around – as some people, and dogs, found to their cost.

In 1816, the Irish surgeon John Jamison shot a platypus in New South Wales. When the overseer picked the injured animal up, the platypus sank its spurs into his right hand and held on until it was killed. The overseer's arm swelled "prodigiously" and he exhibited symptoms similar to those of a bite from a venomous snake. By massaging the animal's hind legs, Jamison found the platypus ejected poison from the spur. In 1869, a platypus spiked a fisherman in the finger. The pain was intense, the man's entire arm swelled and he developed symptoms reminiscent of snakebite. Although painful, platypus venom doesn't seem to be fatal to humans. However, several dogs died after being spiked. Nevertheless, the amateur naturalist Augustus Simson, who experienced excruciating pain after being spiked, reported that some indigenous people would rather hold a snake than a platypus.

Recently, researchers from the University of Adelaide's School of Biological Sciences discovered that monotremes express GLP-1 in their intestines and venoms. Platypus GLP-1 differs in about a third of the amino acids from humans, including the site at which DPP-4 cleaves the hormone. Again, it's resistant to the rapid degradation normally seen in humans. In the platypus gut, GLP-1 regulates blood glucose. But it's also in their venom, used to fight off other males in the mating season. This probably triggered the evolution of a stable form of GLP-1. These findings could lead to a new diabetes drug. Yet we're just scratching the surface of venom's pharmacological potential. After all, venom from a single species can contain hundreds or even several thousands of chemicals. And biologists have studied few venomous animals in detail. I'm waiting for the first drug based on the venom of the Mongolian death worm…

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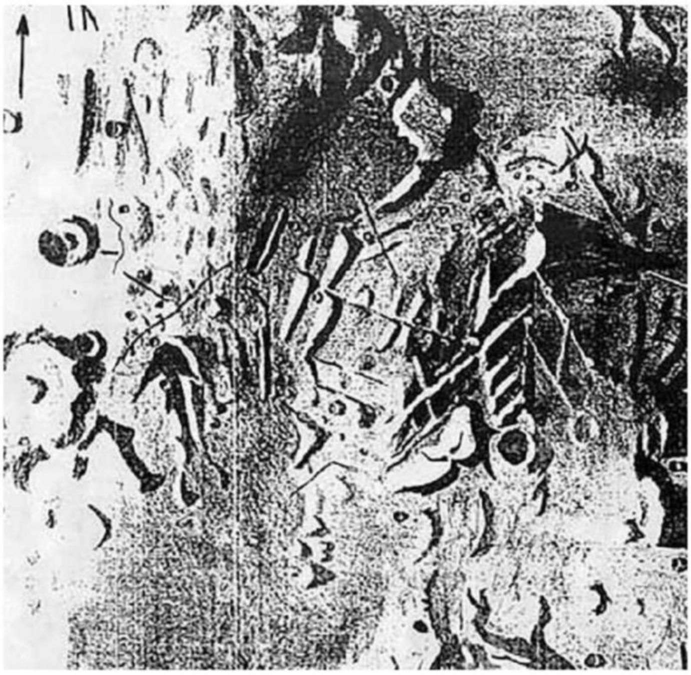
The lost ruins of the Moon

ANDREW MAY explores some of the many artificial lunar structures ‘discovered’ by imaginative observers over the centuries



The Moon is the nearest alien world to Earth, and one that anyone can explore from their own backyard using a small telescope. The downside, of course, is that it’s a notoriously dead world – but that hasn’t prevented over-enthusiastic observers from discovering any number of artificial constructions on its crater-riddled surface.

Regular readers of *Fortean Times* will need no introduction to the concept of pareidolia – the propensity of the human mind to see meaningful structures in random patterns. It helps if the mind in question is coupled with an over-active imagination – as it is, for example, in the case of Michel Ardan, one of the fictional space travellers in Jules Verne’s 1870 novel *Around the Moon*. As their projectile passes over the Moon’s southern highlands, Ardan suddenly claims to spot “an agglomeration of ruins”:

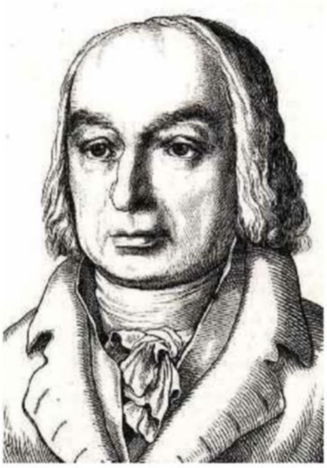
“He perceived the dismantled ramparts of a town; here, the still intact arch of a portico; there, three or four columns lying below their bases; farther on a succession of pillars which must have supported an aqueduct; elsewhere, the shattered piers of a gigantic bridge.”[1]

Verne wasn’t suggesting there really was a ruined city on the Moon – just that Ardan let himself be carried away with wishful thinking. In Verne’s own words: “There was so much imagination in his glance… that his observations are to be mistrusted”. The same could be said of quite a few people on the Internet today, who scour every new image released by NASA in search of anything that might be evidence of alien civilisations.

Long before the Space Age, however, there were Earthbound observers of the Moon’s surface who did much the same thing. In the 19th century, for example, a whole city was supposedly discovered near the crater Schröter. Here’s what the Victorian selenographer Thomas Gwyn Elger said about it:

“It was in the region north of this object, which abounds in little hills and low ridges, that in the year 1822 Gruithuisen discovered a very remarkable formation consisting of a number of parallel rows of hills branching out (like the veins of a leaf from the midrib) from a central valley at an angle of 45 degrees, represented by a depression between two long ridges running from north to south. The regularly arranged hollows between the hills and the longitudinal valley suggested to his fertile imagination that he had at last found a veritable city in the Moon… At any rate, he was firmly convinced that it was the work of intelligent beings, and not due to natural causes.”[2]

The discoverer of this ‘city on the Moon’ wasn’t just a crackpot amateur but a well-respected academic



BELOW AND LEFT: Franz von Gruithuisen and the ‘Moon city’ he discovered in 1822.

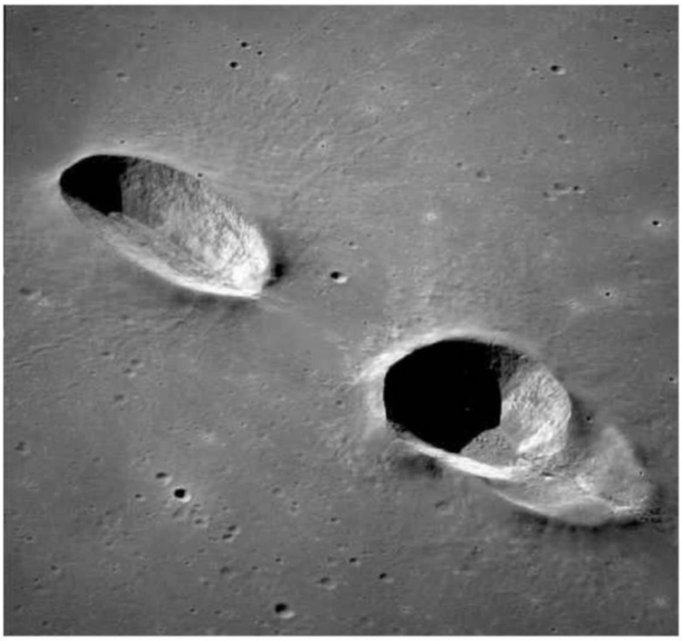
The discoverer of this “city on the Moon” wasn’t just some crackpot amateur. Franz von Gruithuisen (1774 – 1852) was a well-respected academic, who later became a professor of astronomy at the University of Munich.

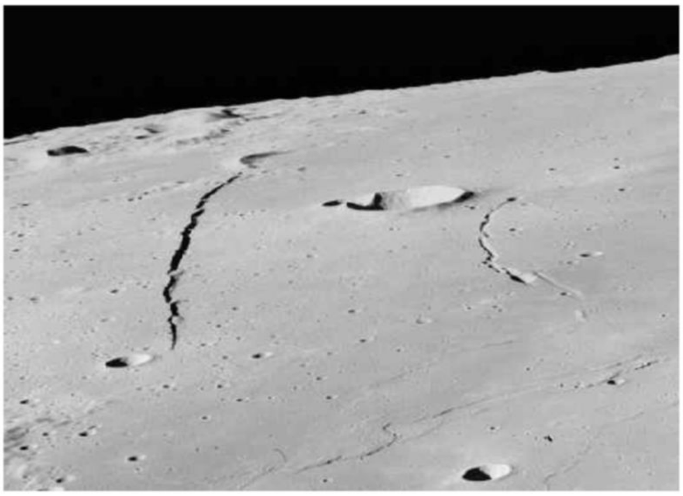
Equally respectable was the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, and keen amateur astronomer, John Joseph O’Neill. Shortly before his death in 1953, O’Neill claimed to have observed an unusual feature near the Moon’s Sea of Crises – or Mare Crisium, to give it its Latin name:

“A gigantic natural bridge has been found on the Moon at the edge of the Mare Crisium, in the rim of its surrounding walls… The bridge extends in a north-south direction and judging from the positions of the shadows cast by its lower supports it has the amazing span of about 12 miles from pediment to pediment.”[3]

O’Neill’s alleged bridge lies in an area of rough terrain that’s particularly difficult to resolve with a small telescope, and his claim proved controversial to say the least. He contended that a particular pattern of light and shadows – seen only for a few hours at a particular phase of the Moon – was caused by sunlight passing through the arch of a bridge. Some astronomers agreed with this interpretation, others disagreed. Unsurprisingly, O’Neill found his strongest supporters among the UFO enthusiasts of the day, who gleefully seized on the idea of a lunar bridge. “It looks artificial,” Donald Keyhoe wrote in his 1955 book *The Flying Saucer Conspiracy*.[4]

Like Gruithuisen’s city – and many other supposed anomalies on the Moon – O’Neill’s Bridge has a tendency to disappear when looked at with a really powerful telescope. But that in





TOP LEFT: Craters Messier and Messier A… or the entrance and exit of an underground tunnel? **BOTTOM LEFT**: The 60-mile Straight Wall or "Railroad".

itself doesn't disprove anything, as Arthur C Clarke has one of his characters – a UFO buff on a lunar vacation – point out in his 1961 novel *A Fall of Moondust*: "It really starts back in 1953, when an American astronomer named O'Neill observed something very remarkable here on the Moon. He discovered a small bridge on the border of the Mare Crisium. Other astronomers, of course, laughed at him – but less prejudiced ones confirmed the existence of the bridge. Within a few years, however, it had vanished. Obviously, our interest had alarmed the Saucer people, and they had dismantled it." [5]

In reality, O'Neill's Bridge was almost certainly an optical illusion, caused by the transitory play of light and shadow. A somewhat similar illusion – one that's easier to see with an amateur telescope – can be found in another of the Moon's seas, Mare Fecunditatis. This one is in a less cluttered area, and it's less reliant on the precise angle of sunlight and shadows. Near the centre of the sea, a small telescope will reveal two craters, called Messier and Messier A, which are a similar size and close together. They're difficult to miss, in fact, because there's a ray of bright debris stretching to the west of them like a comet's tail.

These two craters were almost certainly created by the same impact event, with the incoming meteorite hitting at a low angle and then bouncing across the surface. In the process, this created an interesting optical illusion. If you look at the twin craters with a moderately high magnification, you can imagine they're actually the entrance and exit of an underground tunnel. As David Hatcher Childress put it in his book *Extraterrestrial Archeology*: "Another oddity of the Moon is a strange tunnel about 20 miles [32km] long… Dr HH Nininger, director of the American Meteorite Museum in Winslow, Arizona, announced this discovery back in 1952. He claims that through a good telescope not only can the tunnel be seen but the entrance and the exit of that tunnel are clearly discernible." [6]

According to Nininger's own theory, the tunnel is a natural one – the result of a meteorite hitting a mountain ridge and penetrating all the way through it. Childress, on the other hand, believes it's an artificial construction. Sadly, it probably isn't a tunnel at all – just another optical illusion, which is dispelled in close-up photographs taken from lunar orbit.

The most spectacular of all the Moon's artificial-looking features can seen by anyone with a small telescope just after First Quarter, as the western edge of Mare Nubium begins to emerge from shadow. Its Latin name is Rupes Recta, meaning the Straight Wall – and that's exactly what it looks like. More than 60miles (96km) long, this feature was nicknamed "the Railroad" in the 19th century. In reality, it's neither a railroad nor a wall, as Patrick Moore explained: "The straight wall is not straight, and it is certainly not a wall. The surface of the plain to the west is almost a thousand feet lower than on the east, so that the so-called "wall" is nothing more nor less than a giant fault." [7]

What we see from Earth – the sight that looks so dramatic – is the long black shadow cast by the cliff-edge onto the plain below. Once again, the true nature of the Straight Wall only becomes clear when it's photographed from lunar orbit.

Such evidence notwithstanding, there are still people who insist the Straight Wall is an artificial feature rather than a natural one. A particularly bizarre explanation emerged in the 1970s, in conjunction with the so-called "Spaceship Moon" theory – the idea that the Moon is a hollow, metallic construction built by ancient aliens as a kind of space-battleship. To the advocates of this theory the Straight Wall is no mystery at all, as the author Don Wilson explained: "It is strangely straight, they hold, because this most splendid feature of the lunarscape – a straight wall nearly 500 yards (457m) wide and over 60 miles (96km) long – 'formed as a result of one of the armour plates bending under the impact of celestial torpedoes and raising one of its straight even edges'. It is in effect a section of the spaceship hull or shell that has been ruptured or otherwise damaged that creates this unusual feature." [8]

ANDREW MAY's new book The Telescopic Tourist's Guide to the Moon *is published by Springer (www.amazon.co.uk/Telescopic-Tourists-Patrick-Practical-Astronomy/dp/3319607405).*

NOTES

1 Jules Verne, *From the Earth to the Moon & Around the Moon* (Wordsworth Classics, 2011), p364.

2 Thomas Gwyn Elger, *The Moon: A Full Description and Map of its Principal Physical Features* (Project Gutenberg, 2006), www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/17712/pg17712-images.html.

3 John J O'Neill, "Gigantic Natural Bridge Found on the Moon" (the-moon.wikispaces.com/file/detail/O%27Neill_Bridge_JALPO_10_1953_147-148_50pc.jpg.)

4 David Hatcher Childress, *Extraterrestrial Archeology* (Adventures Unlimited, 2015), p94.

5 Arthur C Clarke, *A Fall of Moondust* (Pan Books, 1964), p178.

6 Childress, op. cit.

7 Patrick Moore, *Patrick Moore on the Moon* (Cassell, 2006), p76.

8 Don Wilson, *Secrets of Our Spaceship Moon* (Sphere, 1980), pp152-3.

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Humans, mammals and ingenuity

Animals were food, co-workers and companions, and their remains served hugely practical and possibly ritual purposes, according to this valuable and – huzzah! – accessible academic handbook.

The Oxford Handbook of Zooarchaeology

Ed: Umberto Albarella, Mauro Rizzetto, Hannah Russ, Kim Vickers, Sarah Viner-Daniels

PUBLISHERS

Hb, 839pp, illus, ISBN 978 019 968 6476 £110.00

Deliberately buried or scattered accidentally, animal remains can offer profound insights into our ancestors' behaviours, lifestyles and beliefs. We interacted with a menagerie in numerous ritual, æsthetic and practical ways. Animals were food, workers (hunting dogs, for instance) and companions. Sometimes the same species was all three.

This important and accessible book shows, among many other themes, how zooarchæology – the study of animal remains – highlights our ancestors' ingenuity. Molluscs and their shells, for example, have been used worldwide as food, bait, dye, medicines, containers, material for tools and adornment, a construction material and in pottery manufacture. Iron Age builders in northern Scotland used whale vertebræ as sockets for door posts and the skull from a sperm whale as a drain cover. In mediæval England, horn was "an important and versatile everyday material".

If our ancestors could find a use for a part of an animal, they did. Catfish pectoral fins helped, for example, release points and tips stuck in the body. Vikings made trophies from walrus penis bones and chopping boards from whale vertebræ.

Otoliths (ear stones) offer a striking example of this. Otoliths are tiny lumps of calcium carbonate in the ear (including in humans) that are involved in hearing and sensing gravity. Paxton (*Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci* 2000; 355: 1299–303) reported that otoliths in 247 species of marine fish ranged from 0.4–31.4mm. Fishing cultures use otoliths and the tiny ear bones as medicines and in divination. Some wore pouches or necklaces of otoliths for their magical properties. Certain fishing communities in northeastern Brazil still make a tea from otoliths to treat kidney disease. Two pits from Brazil dating from about 3,000 years ago were too small to hold 150 fish heads, but contained 300 otoliths. These tiny objects were removed deliberately.

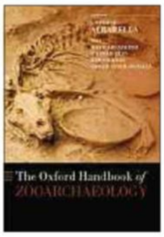
What some remains 'mean' is less clear, however. There isn't, for example, necessarily a clear demarcation between the secular and the sacred. Using whale bone as a building material could have structural, ritual and symbolic significance – or pick any two or all three. The bones of horses from the Carpathian basin revealed that some had serious chronic illnesses, such as fused vertebræ, which meant they could not be ridden. The Carpathians' care for the diseased animals underscores the close relationship and importance to their way of life in the fifth to ninth centuries. It's a societal and personal relationship that most of us can scarcely imagine today.

Domestication is also more complex than it might appear. Sometimes domestication may have been pragmatic, such as turning to meat and animal products when cereals were limited. In many parts of the world, however, the elite perpetuated their socio-political dominance by community feasting. Animal sacrifices and elite grave goods, often representing animals, helped cement Neolithic power structures. So, domestication might also be a response to the demand for feasting and other rituals.

> *"In some cases, production of animistic ritual objects reached an industrial scale."*

Indeed, in some cases, production of animistic ritual objects reached an industrial scale. The ancient Egyptian catacomb of Anubis at Saqqara contained 7.8 million canine mummies. The Ibis galleries contained at least four million mummies of these once sacred birds.

Our ancestors' dynamic relationships with animals also helped drive technological advances. In what is now the Swiss Alps, Neolithic hunters killed red deer for food and for making tools such as sockets to fit wood handles to stone axes. But about 3700 BC, the number of antler artefacts declined markedly, probably following over-hunting. So the ancient Swiss developed ways of attaching the stone directly to the wood. Often these insights arose by looking at disarticulated skeletons (though zooarchæologists also examine hides, cartilage, DNA, shells and so on). If you've looked at a pile of bones in a museum or a biology lab, you'll soon appreciate the often daunting task facing zooarchæologists in interpreting animal remains. Are the remains livestock, companions or commensals – animals that adopted the environment for the opportunities (such as modern urban foxes)?



For instance, there are five subspecies of the wildcat. Their skeletons are essentially indistinguishable from each other and from domestic cats (eurekalert.org/e/7rkw). Cats can be domesticated pest control, feral commensals, companions and even a source of food and pelts. Corvids (such as crows, ravens and rooks) may be commensals (they were designated pests in the 16th century Vermin Acts in England) but they make great pets; and to the 'Celts' (I know the term is controversial) symbolised death and battle. Often context is everything. Attitudes towards, and use of, cats often varied between mediæval towns, and between urban and rural areas. Yet this accessible guide shows how patience, collaboration and scientific rigour is beginning to unlock the secrets and stories in the bones.

The book's historical and geographical range is remarkable from interrelationships between humans and mammals in Siberia to prehistoric fauna in New Zealand. Historically, the book runs from the Stone Age to mediæval England, which highlights the commonalities and differences. And you don't need a degree in anatomy or archæology: the book is accessible and focuses on concepts and themes (rather than anatomical minutiæ), supported by extensive references that allow you to take matters further. The handbook proves that science written by academics doesn't have to be dull and impenetrable to non-

Continued on page 60

Unsolved strangeness

An almost forgotten and very strange alien abduction episode is re-examined but not solved, though CIA involvement is unlikely

No Return

UFO Abduction or Covert Operation?

David Booher

Anomalist Books 2017

Pb, 228, illus, bib, ind, $15.95, ISBN 9781938398841

NO RETURN
UFO ABDUCTION OR COVERT OPERATION?
DAVID BOOHER

No Return revives a curious episode from 1959. Originally investigated soon after its occurrence by pioneering ufologists Jim and Coral Lorenzen and mentioned by Jacques Vallee in a couple of his books, it is remembered only by ufologists with a taste for the historical arcana of their subject. Ironically, those who know of it recall it vividly. Those few, who include the undersigned, first read of it in an article the Lorenzens published in a 1962 issue of Ray Palmer's *Flying Saucers*.

David Booher, a Wisconsin man intrigued by UFOs, has disinterred the case, but he hasn't solved it. From this distance (or, probably, from any distance) no certain explanation is recoverable, given the nature of the event. The witness's crippling amnesia related not only to the occurrence but its subsequent circumstances. At least Booher has answered the question posed in the subtitle. That answer, respectively, is probably yes and probably no. (A qualifying note: one need not believe in literal alien kidnappings to acknowledge that UFO abductions are experiences, however generated and whatever their true nature, it is possible to undergo.)

Driving through rural Utah on the evening of 20 February, Army Private Gerry Irwin spotted a light falling silently from the sky. Concerned that it might be an airplane, he stopped his car and stared out at the ridge it had disappeared under. A brilliant glow flashed, then faded. Irwin scrawled a note to the effect that he had gone to investigate an apparent crash "about one-quarter mile to my right," then employed shoe polish to spell 'STOP' on the vehicle's side door before heading out. The next thing he knew, 24 hours had passed, and he lay in a Cedar City hospital. No plane was missing.

The story gets complicated after that. Though Booher's book is fairly short, it is packed with details requiring focused attention. They include other episodes of amnesia as well as Irwin's frustrating interactions with puzzled or suspicious civilian and military personnel. Booher sometimes belabours the notion of an official cover-up without demonstrating one. Most readers are likely to detect only understandable confusion.

Early in the experience's wake, Irwin had flashes of recollection in which he walked to the top of the hill, looked down, and saw on the ground a fiery UFO-like object, manifestly not an aircraft or a meteorite. (Neither then nor later would Irwin evince the slightest interest in UFOs.) On being administered truth serum, he spoke of an "intelligence" that forbade him from revealing anything more; he added that it had all begun for him when he was three years old. None of this made sense at the time to anyone, but it resonates with a body of testimony waiting to be culled in the coming era of abduction narratives.

In his reconstruction of the incident, Booher uncovers evidence, missed by all previous analysts, that Irwin was transported more than 20 miles during the blackout. He also describes behavioral anomalies, such as Irwin's burning without reading a note he had apparently written during the event. There is also the matter of the jacket on the bush.

The author's foremost discovery, though, is of Irwin's continued existence. In the infrequent citations in UFO literature, Irwin is said to have vanished mysteriously. Booher tracked him to his native Idaho, where he lives happily, his one encounter with notoriety (the incident attracted national press coverage at the time) only uncertainly remembered. Irwin was perplexed at Booher's interest, but he cooperated, helping the author to recover Army records which illuminate, if only barely, the aftermath.

No evidence supports the proposition that Irwin suffered the effects of a mind-control experiment. His interactions with doctors and hospitals did not happen till after his initial sighting and amnesiac episode. For a decade between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s, under the MKUltra code name, the CIA conducted secret behaviour-altering experiments on hapless uninformed subjects (e.g., prisoners, patients, and other confined, monitorable persons). It was exposed by a US Senate committee in 1975 and widely condemned; it is still judged among the Cold War CIA's vilest crimes. In 1973 then-CIA director Richard Helms ordered all surviving records burned, a gift to conspiracy theorists everywhere. Fanciful speculation notwithstanding, proof that the CIA engineered faux-UFO encounters remains as elusive as evidence for crashed saucers.

No Return is admirable work, clearing up – to the limited extent possible – a curious case from the early UFO age, among the first to hint that even higher strangeness was lurking just over the horizon.

Jerome Clark

Continued from page 59

specialists. All the chapters are robust and rigorous, but they convey the authors' passion for their subject.

The Oxford Handbook of Zooarchæology is expensive. Hopefully, it'll appear in paperback or you can borrow it. I expected to dip in and out. In fact, I read all the way through and have referred to it several times since. *The Handbook* deserves a wide audience outside those of us with a specific interest: it is an eloquent testament to the strength, importance and relevance of zooarchæology. The past tells us so much about ourselves.

Mark Greener

★★★★★

THEN

Science Fiction Fandom in the UK: 1930–1980

Rob Hansen

Ansible Editions 2016

Pb, 454pp, notes, illus, inds, £20.00, ISBN 9781326366759

Readers of my series about the UK's 'First Forteans' (**FT308–FT325**) – who would like to learn more about the genealogy of our topic can do no better than read *THEN*, Rob Hansen's monumental history of British science-fiction (SF). As veteran SF fanzine editor Peter Weston records in his introduction, nearly every generation from 1930 to 1980 attempted a history of SF fandom, only to fail partly because fandom was incredibly diverse. Individuals and groups were scattered throughout these isles and beyond – and few (if any) knew many, and certainly not all, of them. This was before the days of email and the Internet, when nearly all fan communication was by letter, newsletter or fanzine (to rank them by sophistication and circulation). Gatherings were rare, usually taking the form of pub meetings or the occasional convention. While there were more serious projects (associations, clubs and book services) over time, any collections of these publications was likely to be private and (most likely) disorganised.

Rob's first entry into SF fandom was, Weston notes, around 1975, and he quickly became a key figure in the

search for and collection of documentation, especially of the early protagonists and their activities up to, during, and through the first decade after WWII. Aided by a few like-minded folk and some (now quite) old-timers, archives were rescued, scanned and made available on the Internet, supplemented by sites for online discussion and reminiscing. Few of this tribe are more qualified than Rob to write this priceless social history of the fans who laid the groundwork for such pervasive genres as SF and fantasy movies, RPG gaming, 'what if' speculations and other sorts of futurism.

He details the lives and interactions of several hundred of the UK's leading fans, their literary output… and boy, could most of them write! Here are early glimpses of Arthur C Clarke, John Wyndham, Fred Brown, Christopher Priest, Charles Eric Maine, William Temple, Ted Carnell, Bob Shaw and so many others; and among them the early forteans including Eric Frank Russell, Sid Birchby and Harold Chibbett. Others, like Benson Herbert, George Hay and Raymond Cass, were developing experimental technology; and still others (like Egerton Sykes on Atlantis) became foremost scholars in their subject. This fat book also records the crossovers between SF and the burgeoning comic book fandom, at home and in the USA, and from 1947, the rise of ufology, and of 'alternative' and New Age culture, paving the way for most other modern fandoms. Here, too, our early roots can be found among those youngsters (often in their late teens or early 20s) who founded the Manchester rocketry group, various astronomical societies and pioneering psychical research teams.

My own place in this lineage is that I once met Chibbett, corresponded with some of those early forteans (including Eric Frank Russell), and as an apprentice to Peter Weston learnt how to put together a fanzine… until I gafiated (you'll have to look it up) and started *FT*.

Rob Hansen's narrative is engaging, despite the deluge of faces and facts, dates and titles, collaborations and feuds. There are lists of conventions, fan polls, folk with portraits herein, fandom statistics, and copious source notes. As Peter Weston notes: "It is [..] a minor miracle that it ever came to be written," concluding: "Without Rob we would know almost nothing about British fan history, whereas, thanks to him, we now know just about everything." It is privately published by David Langford: more details at ae.ansible.uk/

Bob Rickard

★★★★☆

The Spirits of Crossbones Graveyard

Time, Ritual and Sexual Commerce in London

Sondra L Hausner

Indiana University Press 2016
Pb, 234pp, $28, photos, notes, bib, ind, ISBN 9780253021366

Down a little sidestreet a few minutes' walk from London Bridge station, an iron fence by a small patch of land is festooned with brightly coloured ribbons. A plaque informs us that "In medieval times this was an unconsecrated graveyard for prostitutes or 'Winchester Geese'". These women, we're told, were licensed by the Bishop of Winchester to ply their trade, but because of that trade they were not allowed burial in consecrated ground. Tudor historian John Stow wrote in 1598 of "a Plot of Ground, called the Singlewoman's Church yard", singlewoman being a euphemism for prostitute. Over the years it became more generally a paupers' graveyard until, "overcharged with dead" (i.e. full to overflowing), it was closed in 1853. When the Jubilee line was constructed nearby in the 1990s, 148 skeletons were uncovered by Museum of London archæologists, a tiny proportion of those thought to be there.

On the 23rd of every month, local playwright and poet John Constable, who discovered the story of Crossbones Graveyard in a shamanic vision in 1996 and has protected and promoted it ever since, leads a short public ritual at the fence to remember "the outcast dead", drawing from many spiritual traditions. His mystery play, *The Southwark Mysteries*, telling the story of the prostitutes, has been performed in the Globe Theatre and in Southwark Cathedral in 2000 and 2010 (see **FT264:38–39**). Southwark is just across the river from the City of London, and outside its restrictions; it was where Londoners went not just for prostitutes but for bear-baiting and, famously, theatres; the Globe and the Rose are nearby.

How much of the Crossbones story is fact, and how much myth? This is the question asked by Oxford anthropologist Prof Sondra Hausner in the first academic work on Crossbones. In part it's a history of the role of prostitutes in society, and in part a study of the value of ritual; the narrative slips back and forth between the past and the present. "We make ourselves through ritual," she says, and yes, ritual links to the past. "But what all these places and memories and identities and acts of empowerment, individual and collective, are about is the present, the discovery and articulation of who we are now. That is the transformative power of ritual."

The Church had an oddly practical view of prostitution. Hausner quotes the 4th-century Augustine: "If you remove harlots from society you will disrupt everything because of lust." The 13th-century Thomas Aquinas was even more forthright: sex work is "like a sewer in a palace. Take away the sewer, and you will fill the palace with pollution … Take away prostitutes from the world and you will fill it with sodomy" (any "unnatural" sex).

The Bishop of Winchester didn't actually license prostitutes, she says, but he took rent from the brothels on his land. Remarkably, there were regulations on how brothel keepers were to treat the prostitutes: the women worked for themselves, not for the brothel keepers, who couldn't take any cut beyond the rent for the room; they must have freedom of movement and could not be kept against their will.

But was Crossbones actually a mediæval prostitutes' graveyard? Hausner says there is no archæological or cartographic evidence for it being any older than early 18th century. "Crossbones is not a medieval graveyard, but an early modern one; it is the St Saviour's burying ground, but it is not Stow's 'Plot of Ground', which remains unidentified. This is not that place," she states categorically.

But she goes on: "It is not a 15th-century graveyard, but we are in mythic time and ritual space: does it matter?" Her conclusion, having summarily demythologised – indeed, debunked – John Constable's Crossbones story, is that the myth is hugely powerful in its own right. The essence of the story is (more or less) true; what does it matter if the monthly ritual, the fence and plaque and, since last year, the beautiful and peaceful Garden of Remembrance, are in the wrong place?

David V Barrett

★★★★☆

The Haunted Moustache

David Bramwell

CHEEKYGUIDES 2016
Hb, 192pp, photos, £12.95, ISBN 9780956130334

The Haunted Moustache is a Wunderkammer, with the aforementioned facial hair front and centre. At first glance it might look like a book, but as you'll find looks can be deceptive, names can change and everyone has an alter ego that they can wear. In other compartments of this small book-like cabinet you will find hag-stones, secret societies, builders moonlighting as mediums, the number 23, Alan Moore, and a man with a fireplace on his head.

With a beautiful font, a red, black and white colour-scheme and delicately curved moustache motifs throughout, David Bramwell's latest publication is also a beautiful object to have on your shelves.

Sometimes a memoir of life in Brighton during the Nineties, at others a road-trip to find what hides in the Lincolnshire woods, *The Haunted Moustache* is a highly readable exploration of the strange and delightful that makes life worth celebrating.

Steve Toase

UFOs

Reframing the Debate

Ed: Robbie Graham

White Crow Books 2017
Pb, 300pp, £12.99

As with any anthology, Robbie Graham's *UFOs: Reframing the Debate* is a bit of a mixed bag, with some entries being of greater interest than others. This collection begins with a kind of back-and-forth approach between experiencers/true believers and sceptics, before moving into entries by more cautious – and therefore more nuanced – theorists who look at the UFO phenomena from perspectives that are refreshingly different from the mainstream psychologically and sociologically-focused abduction phenomena and the more scientifically-based "nuts and bolts" approach. Among the essays that merit close attention are Curt Collins's thoroughly readable and engaging minute-by-minute recounting of the 'Roswell slides' debacle, the always elegant theoretical approaches of Greg Bishop, who here argues that human consciousness and perception inevitably influence both the experience and any subsequent attempts at making sense of UFO encounters, Red Pill Junkie's celebration of the ongoing impenetrability of the phenomenon, Lorin Cutts's "mythological zone" that exists between unexplained phenomena and its experience, Micah Hanks on the ideological underpinnings of modern-day UFO scepticism, Joshua Cutchin's provocative argument that we move beyond materialism in our attempts to come to grips with the phenomenon, and Robert Brandstetter's concluding, decidedly philosophical essay which seeks to use the UFO as a mirror for human experience.

Regrettably, Graham's inclusivity has the result of making this collection a bit unfocused and perhaps unintentionally watering down its impact. Given that there is no shortage of writings by devotees and cynics, of which at least one third of the essays here are curious examples, this volume would have perhaps benefited from less inclusiveness and a tighter editorial focus. Altogether, there wasn't much debate to reframe for this reviewer; however, Graham's volume remains a useful compendium for novice readers, providing them with both interesting repetitions of and welcome alternatives to the stale Roswell/abduction/*X-Files* mythology that continues to dominate the UFO field. What's left of it, anyway.

Eric Hoffman

★★★★☆

Beyond Watchmen & Judge Dredd

The Art of John Higgins

John Higgins

Liverpool University Press 2017
Pb, 276pp, illus, plates, bib, £20.00, ISBN 9781786940278

Do you read comics? Quick couple of questions. Name your favourite letterer. How about your top three colourists?

The influence of these professionals is getting brought to the fore more often in comics (for example the excellent work of Nick Filardi, Lee Loughbridge, and Matt Wilson in *Cry Havoc*). However, colourists' impact on the tone of the story still often gets overlooked. *Beyond Watchmen & Judge Dredd* goes some way to address this shortfall.

Watchmen is one of the most famous comics on the planet. Alongside Alan Moore's ground-breaking story, and Dave Gibbon's world class artwork, it is the use of colour by John Higgins that influences the mood and emotion of the story.

Beyond Watchmen & Judge Dredd goes into great detail about some of the decisions for the colour choices made. As the title suggests there is far more to enjoy here. Part biography, part retrospective, and part technical manual, *Beyond Watchmen & Judge Dredd* is conversational in style, yet there is a lot of detail here. For example, the description of colour temperature is fascinating, and Higgins makes the point that a good colourist can create a mood and emotional response.

Higgins's career has ranged from line drawings for books (the sequential of a candle melting down a skull to animate the face is one of the best illustrations you will see), to his self-published comic *Razorjack*. As you would expect this book is full of lush illustrations, with work from *2000AD, The Hills Have Eyes*, and *Jacked*. My personal favourite? The unsettling cover of *World Without End #3*.

If you have even a passing interest in comics I would highly recommend *Beyond Watchmen & Judge Dredd*. It's not a book that tells you where the bodies are buried, but with its advice on techniques, setting up a workspace, materials, and work practices, by the end you could probably draw some suitably decaying corpses.

Steve Toase

★★★★☆

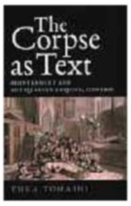
The Corpse as Text

Disinterment and Antiquarian Enquiry, 1700–1900

Thea Tomaini

The Boydell Press 2017
Hb, 241pp, illus, bib, ind, £65.00, ISBN 9781783271948

In the 18th and 19th century, antiquarian investigators unearthed a number of mediæval graves. In some cases, the goal was to move the body to a new location; in others, the grave was revealed during construction or renovation. In all cases, Thea Tomaini argues, these disinterments were a way in which antiquarians "read" their own stories about the Middle Ages onto mediæval bodies.



Tomaini covers nine bodies in seven examples in this book: King John, Katherine de Valois, Thomas Becket, Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, Katherine Parr, William Shakespeare and the rival bodies of Charles I and Oliver Cromwell. Each case begins with a summary of the burial and the circumstances of the disinterment and broadens into an analysis of contemporary views of the Middle Ages. Each of the burials plays a role in reinforcing and creating those views, which tied in to contemporary ideas about British society.

For example, Tomaini talks about the ways in which different writers have described the corpse of King John, which was disinterred and examined several times over the centuries, and compares their varying accounts to the way in which John's posthumous reputation changed over the same period. Controversies over the details of the burial play into changing perceptions of John's character, from the English Reformation to the popularity of Robin Hood stories. John becomes "a figure of frustrating elasticity" whose body becomes an integral part, not merely a passive symbol, of the debate about the meaning of his life and reign.

These studies form a fascinating guide to the ways in which antiquarian study and disinterment played into the formation of British identity, as well as a particularly ghoulish case study of how past lives and events are interpreted, reinterpreted and used (though Tomaini believes that antiquarians were motivated by more than simple ghoulishness).

Tomaini doesn't spend much time on specifically supernatural readings of the past, which are among the many ways people express and construct views of history. She does discuss ghost stories related to Cromwell and Charles I, though I was sad not to see the story that Sidney Sussex College in Cambridge is haunted by the ghost of Cromwell's severed head.

The Corpse as Text is an interesting look at the ways in which people in the 18th and 19th centuries not only perceived the past but wrote their own narratives on it. It is definitely an academic rather than a generalist text, but it does provide most of the background a lay reader will need.

If you're interested in how people relate to the bodies of the dead, it's an excellent addition to your library.

James Holloway

★★★★☆

ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

Giants on Record

Jim Viera & Hugh Newman

Avalon Rising Publications 2015

Pb, 395pp, illus, £14.99, ISBN 9780956786517

This late arrival deserves a mention because it is a rare treatment of a rare subject. The authors have recovered, from 200 years' worth of files and publications of the Smithsonian Institution, "thousands" of newspaper reports (and other historical documents) that record discoveries of anatomical, physical and structural remains suggesting that the continental USA was once home to a race of giant humanoids. Much of that evidence is presented here making it a valuable archive and reference. They have supplemented this with evidence that as the notion came to be considered too preposterous for orthodox scientific opinion, the Smithsonian together with leading archæologists and anthropologists began to play down any discussion and even cover up the material evidence. So far so good; however, the authors' additional chapters are more speculative, surveying cultural myths of giants and reports of encounters by early explorers; examining the claims by various 'secret societies' that acknowledged the existence of giants in the ancient past; exploring the theory that the giants were related to the ancient Denisovans from Siberia, and biblical Nephilim and others. This is a huge, sprawling book, desperately in need of an index... but we are glad to have it anyway.

The Mystery of Skara Brae

Laird Scranton

Inner Traditions 2016

Pb, 198pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, $16.95, ISBN 9781620555736

Built sometime around 3200 BC (that's over 5,000 years ago), Skara Brae was a small village on the island of Orkney. After around six centuries of occupation, it was abandoned in 2600 BC, leaving intriguing mysteries. Why was it covered over, perhaps deliberately? Who were its peaceful occupants? Where did they come from and where did they go? Scranton's suggestion – laid out here in some detail – is that there are curious similarities between the megalithic remains of the village and the Dogon legacy in Mali, and also with the ancient ruins of Gobekli Tepe. He explores other correspondences with the linguistics and cosmology of early Egyptian and Vedic traditions, leading him to conclude that Skara Brae had been settled by a long-lost Egyptian mystery sect. Even more enigmatic is his suggestion that the tillage surrounding the settlement compares well with the 'heavenly field' ritualistic farming pattern found in many ancient cultures, including among the Dogon and the Chinese. Inevitably, this is heretical to orthodox archæology, anthropology and history, but if they are not based upon error, Scranton's questions deserve sound answers.

Alien World Order

Len Kasten

Bear & Co 2017

Pb, 314pp, illus, reading list, ind, $18.00, ISBN 9781591432395

According to the cover endorsement by David Jacobs, a leading apologist of 'alien abduction' theory, this book puts together all the pieces of the alien puzzle. "Long ago", we are told, at the behest of the Galactic Federation, Atlans ("humans from the Pleiades") fought the shapeshifting Reptilian masters who had conquered this Earth and enslaved its population of hybrid reptilian-humans. The Reptilians, led by a Queen, took subterranean refuge beneath India, from where they have been messing with surface people ever since. This epic is told in such staggering detail (i.e., names, conversations, records of secret meetings etc) that we wonder how it can have been undiscovered for so long. Aha! Unlike Sitchin, who at least relies on tangible Sumerian tablets for his fantasies, Kasten's source turns out to be "a very unusual historian", an Apache-Hopi called Robert Morning Sky, who had it all from his grandfather, who had it from tribesmen who rescued an alien from a pre-Roswell UFO crash in New Mexico. Is this the genesis of a new cosmology?

The Haunting of Asylum 49

Richard Estep & Cami Anderson

Career Press 2016

Pb, 189pp, ind, $15.99, ISBN 9781632650627

Anderson's family own a former medical facility near Salt Lake City called Asylum 49. The authors claim that its sinister former staff maintained a regime of terror that resulted in the place being haunted by ghosts of tortured inmates and a demonic 'Guardian' entity. This is another product of the deplorable industry, prevalent in the USA, of deliberately ramping up an alleged investigation into a marketable product (i.e., a book, DVD or TV series episode). Despite all the claims herein, the breathless telling and lack of any plausible evidence (beyond subjective experience) is quite unconvincing.

The Wilson Papers

Genesis of the World's Most Fearsome Secret

WA Harbinson

CreateSpace 2017

Pb, 157pp, $9.95, ISBN 9781540894816

Harbinson is the Arthur C Clarke Award-nominated author of countless books ranging from military fiction and celebrity biographies to what we might call the genre of factoid-novelisation.

A great many of his books include real data on topics of interest to us, including time travel, religious phenomena (such as possession, stigmata, divine apparitions and the return of a messiah), historical mysteries (such as the 'crystal skulls'), and imaginative developments on the leading edge of physical and computer science – but they are written as novels.

He is particularly known for his *Lodestone* series of occult thrillers, and the five novels that make up his Projekt Saucer series, which develops the potential of UFOs from their genesis as a Nazi weapon through to a future cyborg war.

Harbinson's signature technique is the pretence of editing secret or newly discovered documents that reveal a dramatic adventure or terrifying fate for mankind, based upon a wide range of fortean, New Age and fringe science literature. Thus, *The Wilson Papers* open in a familiar fashion, revealing an autobiographical account of the life and adventure of John Wilson, an enigmatic character known to forteans as the mysterious alleged 'inventor' or creator of airships that caused a panic across the USA in 1896–1897, who, in time, comes to the attention of modern security agencies.

This is an old-fashioned SF/occult pulp-fiction binge in which Harbinson re-visits nearly all his previous material.

The Man Who Would Be Jack

David Bullock

Thistle Publishing 2016

Pb, 263pp, notes, bib, £10.00, ISBN 9781786080219

As you'd expect from a Jack the Ripper walking tour guide, David Bullock excels as a narrator, but his devotion to the idea that Jack was Charles Cutbush, a paranoid ne'er-do-well, puts him at odds with the 'serious' Ripperologists. Although Bullock has added extensive notes and a bibliography, this reissue of the 2012 edition makes little attempt to correct the errors and omissions that annoyed critics of the first printing and still lacks the necessary index.

Bullock's portrait of Cutbush – who was committed to Broadmoor in March 1891, dying in his cell in 1903 – is, indeed, a thrilling tale of a cunning, violent man, fascinated by photos of disembowelled women, threatening to slit throats, and stabbing a few women in the buttocks (in this he could be added to Fort's list of other pin-jabbing, bum-slashing 'Jacks' haunting London at that time). But however he tries, Bullock can't convincingly equate Cutbush's behaviour with the vicious vivisections of the original Jack killings (between 1888 and 1891).

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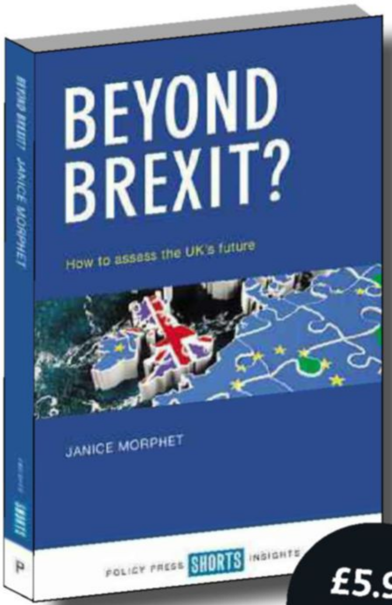

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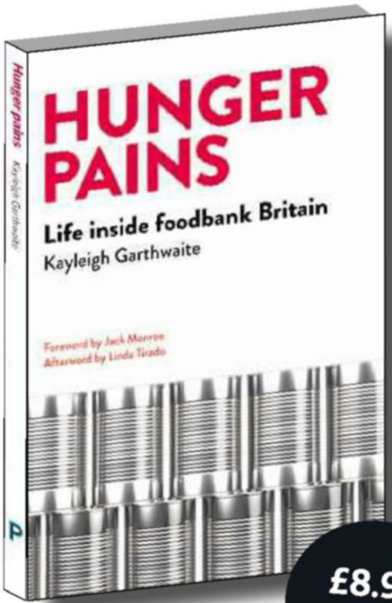

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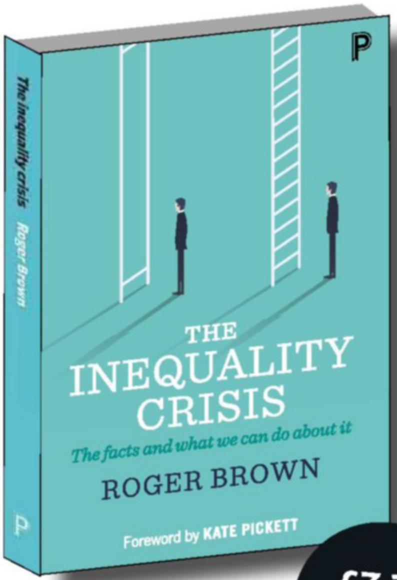

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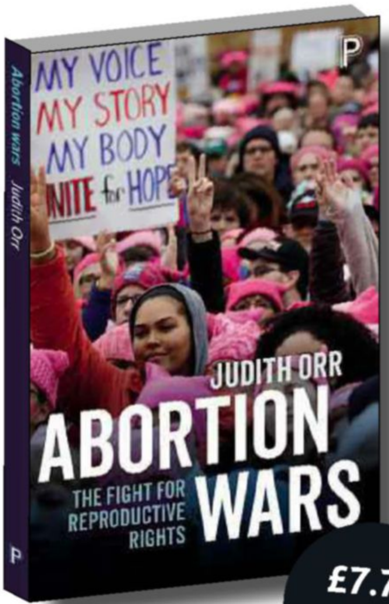

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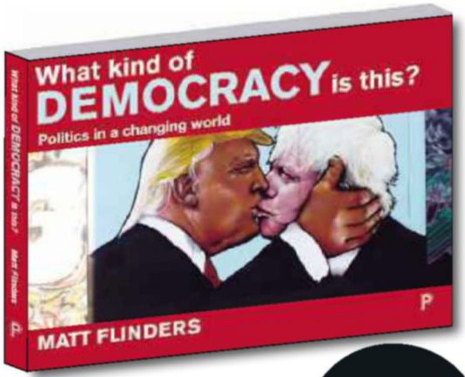

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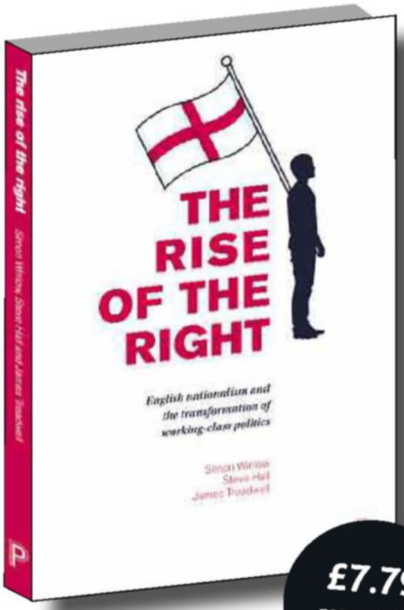

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Dark doings Down Under

This violent new outback horror movie is beautifully made and genuinely terrifying – but does the Australian film industry really have nothing better to do than scare us all away?

Killing Ground

Dir Damien Power, Australia 2017
On UK release from 29 September

There is a long tradition within Australian cinema that deals with what can only be described as fear, be it fear of the country's ancient and unknowable past, of the environment, or of the lawless, ungoverned spaces that make up much of the landmass. Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave* are examples of the first, and Colin Eggleston's *Long Weekend* of the second. This new film from Damien Power falls into the third category, which puts it in the same realm as *Wolf Creek*.

> *The violence is so overpowering as to crush the spirit of those watching*

The set-up is simple: a young couple, Ian (Ian Meadows) and Sam (Harriet Dyer), drive out to a remote national park for a few days' camping during the Christmas holidays. When they arrive, they are mildly disappointed to discover another tent already there; but the following day, when its owners fail to appear, they begin to worry. Then they are shocked to find a scratched and bruised little boy stumbling down the trail, and begin to think something terrible has happened.

This may be straightforward enough; however, the director has chosen to tell his story as three separate timelines, intercut with one another. The first follows Ian and Sam as they try to deal with the immediate situation; another follows two brutish ne'er do wells, German and Chook (Aarons Pedersen and Glenane respectively), slobbing around trying to pick up girls; and the third follows the fate of the occupants of the abandoned tent. It is not immediately clear how, when or why the three timelines converge, but as the film progresses it all becomes terrifyingly apparent.

In his once indispensable *Film Guide*, the grand old curmudgeon of criticism Leslie Halliwell summarised the 1976 film *Death Weekend* as a "hoary shocker chiefly concerned with rape, the threat of rape and various unpleasant methods of murder", and that's also a pretty accurate summary of *Killing Ground*. I wouldn't go so far as to call it torture porn, but it comes pretty close. The violence isn't of a particularly graphic kind but it is so overpowering as to crush the spirit not only of those suffering it but also of those watching it.

The reason it is so effective is because it is so skilfully made. The attention to detail is tremendous – often it's the things glimpsed in the background or out of the corner of the eye that are the most suggestive, and Power also leaves gaps in the action which the audience has to fill in with nightmares of their own imagining. As such, there are scenes and images that stay with you longer than would be the case if everything had been laid on a plate. The acting helps too: Pedersen and Glenane are outstanding as the two thugs, managing to imbue even the vilest of men with recognisably human characteristics.

However, my main concern about the film is why it exists at all. It's gut-churning, tense and gripping but it's too upsetting to be described as entertainment; and, as regards verisimilitude, it (hopefully) tells us less about the real Australia than does *Neighbours*. Consequently, I was left wondering – bearing in mind that the Australian film industry produces only a handful of home-grown features per year – if the enormous talent, energy and resources that went into this film's production couldn't have been put to better use on something else. Taken in isolation it's a lean, efficient piece of work that delivers the goods and has an undeniable impact; but when you put it in a wider context it seems less impressive or worthwhile. Definitely see it if this sort of subject matter is your bag; but, if it is not, stay well away.

Daniel King

★★★☆☆

Wind River

Dir David Lowery, US 2017
On UK release from 8 September

Having written the scripts for 2015's *Sicario* and 2016's *Hell or High Water*, Taylor Sheridan takes on the dual role of writer/director for the grim proceedings of *Wind River*, the third and final instalment of his 'Modern American Frontier' trilogy.

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

The Slayer

Dir J S Carbone, US 1982

Arrow Video, £17.99 (Dual Format)

When two couples take a holiday on a deserted island, everything looks idyllic, if a little desolate. But when one of the husbands goes missing, things take a turn for the sinister. Has he just wandered off? Has he drowned in the sea? Or is there an evil creature stalking them all? Sensitive artist Kay knows it's the latter: because she's seen this place before – in her childhood dreams.

Released in 1982, *The Slayer* is a bit different from other slashers. For a start, there's a strong emphasis on the supernatural, rather than plain old knife-to-the-guts stuff. Plus there aren't any teenagers necking beer or getting laid. It's just urban professionals, sipping wine and chatting about work, marriage and art.

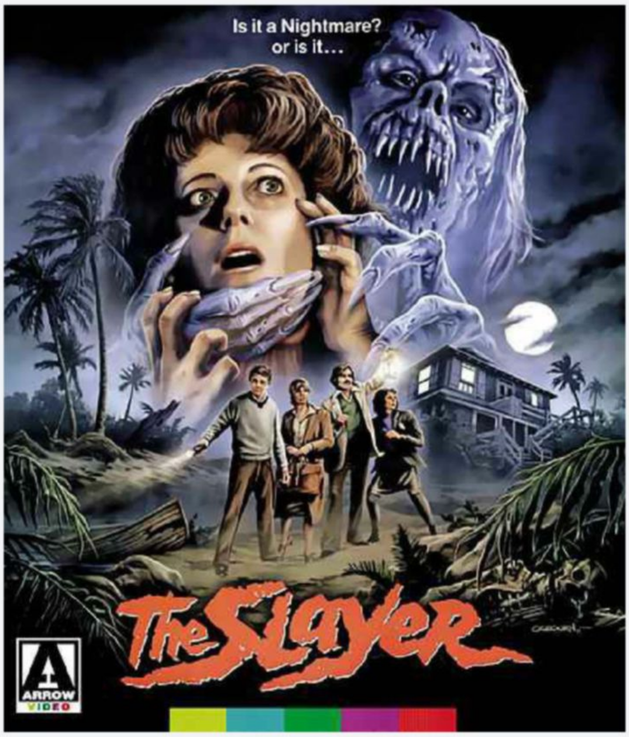
The atmosphere and rhythms of the film are different too. People do die, but the murders feel rationed and sparse. This low body count gives the film an occasional sense of plod, so be prepared to watch characters walking around while calling out the names of other characters, a lot.

Yet it's the unique *feel* of the film that really strikes a chord. It's just so damn ominous. The excellent cinematography and orchestral score pile on the dread and melancholy, leaving you with a film that just feels, well… lonely. The couples don't even love each other as you'd expect, which lends a creepy, miserable, dream-like coldness to the whole affair. This is, of course, deliberate. This film explored 'dream killers' years before Freddy Krueger ever raked his metal glove across a pipe. There's even a scene where a woman desperately tries to survive by staying awake. I reckon Wes Craven might have seen this…

There's a creepy, miserable, dream-like coldness to the whole affair

The film may meander its way to the kills, but they do arrive, and a couple are fairly brutal. They're technically impressive too: bleeding eyes and pitchforked chests look surprisingly unsettling here, and the monster (when it eventually turns up) is really rather cool.

The folks at Arrow Video clearly have a lot of affection for *The Slayer*, and their enthusiasm is infectious. The 4K restoration is – compared to the dingy-looking VHS of old – a revelation. The extras are sweet too, like the isolated score selections and the location visit to Tybee Island. You can even watch the entire film with an audio track featuring the Tybee locals. They watched the premier of this restoration in the original theatre featured in the film, so Arrow recorded their reaction and threw it on this release, too. It's the sort of extra that feels slightly pointless and a bit mad, I guess, but I found it (and the whole package) a pretty beguiling cocktail of horror flavours.


Is it a Nightmare?
or is it…
The Slayer
ARROW VIDEO

In this closing chapter, a young Native American woman is found dead in the cold wastes of the Wind River Indian Reservation by local tracker Cory Lambert (Jeremy Renner). The circumstances surrounding her death are suspicious to say the least, and the FBI sends the inexperienced but determined Jane Banner (Elizabeth Olsen) in to assist the local police. However, she is out of her depth on the reservation, where the locals are less helpful to the outsider, and Lambert joins forces with her in an attempt to solve the tragic murder and also hopefully get some vicarious closure after a traumatic loss of his own.

While Renner and Olsen have starred together twice before as members of Marvel's Avengers, *Wind River* is anything but a fun solo romp for Hawkeye and the Scarlet Witch. Sheridan's previous scripts have been depressingly bleak yet undeniably compelling, and this establishes a similar tone and feel. The visuals are both magnificent and haunting, conveying not just the vastness of the reservation but also a powerful feeling of isolation and hopelessness. The sense of loss and injustice associated with the young woman's death is maintained throughout the film, as her parents' grief intertwines with Lambert's past experiences.

Unfortunately, Olsen's role is not afforded the same depth as Renner's, and the scenes involving the pair as the investigation progresses become increasingly tiresome rather than intriguing. As a result, the more dialogue-heavy scenes tend to meander and run the risk of hindering the viewer's continued investment in the two leads as the film progresses. While the final act offers a highly memorable sequence that is heart-poundingly intense, the film as a whole suffers from slack pacing and deficiencies in the tension department. Those who prefer a very slow build-up may enjoy the overarching structure and the contrast it creates to that final conflict, but to most, *Wind River* will be a watchable but ultimately underwhelming conclusion to this dark trilogy about modern America.

Leyla Mikkelsen

★★★☆☆

Eat Locals

Dir Jason Flemyng, UK 2017
On UK release from 1 September

Charismatic character actor Jason Flemyng has graced screens both big and small in a wide variety of roles over the years, but with *Eat Locals* he steps behind the camera to direct his first feature film. Featuring an all-star cast of British actors, the film concerns eight vampire overlords having their semi-centennial meeting in the English countryside. Sadly, it is no longer as easy to be a vampire as it once was, and as they discuss the state of the world, a Special Forces team trained specifically in slaying vampires is closing in on them.

The laughs are probably supposed to rack up alongside the corpses, but despite the impressive cast the film feels cheap and falls flat. Presumably aiming for a low-budget, horror comedy style mixing the hilarious *What We Do In The Shadows* with the humour and suspense *Dog Soldiers*, the intentions of *Eat Locals* are undoubtedly good, but the execution is lacking in both production value and comic timing, thereby squandering an otherwise promising premise.

Leyla Mikkelsen

★☆☆☆☆

Operation Avalanche

Dir Matt Johnson, US/Canada 2016
Lionsgate, £6.99 (DVD)

If you're left wondering whether a film is supposed to be funny, it's a fair bet that if it was, it didn't succeed – and if it wasn't, but you thought it might be, then that's even worse. *Operation Avalanche* ticks all the wrong boxes. It's "found footage", which means shaky hand-held camera, poor angles and dodgy sound throughout. It's ludicrously amateurish in almost every way – the plotting, the dialogue, the acting, the directing. The story is a ridiculously improbable variant on a conspiracy theory that's been around for decades.

It's 1967. The CIA has recruited a few young film graduates for some sort of PR project. There's a suspicion that NASA has been infiltrated by a mole feeding Top Secret information to the Russians, so the boys are sent into NASA to do a bit of spying while ostensibly shooting a documentary about the Space Race. After bugging a few phones they discover that senior people at NASA know that the proposed Moon landing, as promised by JFK in 1962, can't happen; the Moon lander can't carry enough fuel to take off again. One of the lads, Matt Johnson, comes up with the idea of faking some film of the astronauts walking on the Moon. Everything else will be real, including Apollo 11 orbiting the Moon – only the landing will be faked. Even Mission Control at Houston needn't know; the "landing" will occur (or not) on the dark side of the Moon, when the astronauts are out of touch with Earth, so Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins can simply beam the fake footage back when they're ready. How do our guys manage to create said footage? They nip over to Britain, slip onto the set at Stanley Kubrick's filming of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and "borrow" his front-projection techniques.

There are so many holes in the plot, from beginning to end, that the storyline has no credibility at all. Would the CIA really send young rookies into NASA to hunt out a Russian mole? Does no one ever mind this junior film crew wandering around Top Secret establishments with cameras? Can two or three of them really fake the footage so no one will suspect? How can they manage it without NASA knowing? Who are the guys who keep spying on them, and eventually attack them in a car chase shoot-out?

Young Canadian Matt Johnson is director, co-producer, co-writer and lead actor (as himself); his previous film, *The Dirties*, which was about school bullying, cost $10,000 to make and won a number of awards. *Operation Avalanche*'s apologists would probably describe it as an art movie about cinematic manipulation of the perception of reality; more prosaically, it's a mockumentary on the making of a hoax; more realistically, it's a mess.

Operation Avalanche scores highly on one thing: the feel of the Sixties. Partly this is down to the clothes, cars and hairstyles, of course, and partly the lighting, and cinematography, which achieves a convincing period look.

David V Barrett

★★☆☆☆

SHORTS

DOBERMAN COP

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Dual Format)

From Kinji Fukasaku, the director who brought us Battles Without honor and Humanity and Battle Royale, comes Doberman, a live-action adaptation of manga writer Buronson's gekiga series *Doberman Dek*. Starring martial arts wiz Sonny Chiba as the eponymous hero, it's a tale of maverick detectives, serial killers, bikers and pigs. Chiba is Joji Kano, an unconventional cop from Okinawa who arrives in Tokyo to aid in the investigation of the murder of a young woman from his island. Along the way he gets mixed up in a yakuza scheme to make a singing star of a beautiful former prostitute and also with a gang of bikers, the leader of which the authorities want to blame for the murder. It's all as delirious as it sounds, delivered at breakneck speed with bone-crunching violence and the occasional pit stop for a gloopy ballad, in a manner which makes the Italian cop films of the 1970s – the *poliziotteschi* – seem restrained in comparison. **DK** ★★★☆☆

FUTURE SHOCK! THE STORY OF 2000AD

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)

A documentary about one of the greatest successes and most influential titles in the history of British comics seems like a fine idea, but this parade of talking heads soon wears out its welcome. More in the way of context – in terms of both social and comic book history – would have been helpful and might have dispelled the visual monotony that quickly (and ironically, given the subject matter) sets in; it might also have cast the sometimes insightful but often egocentric contributions of some interviewees in a more sympathetic light. At times, watching the film feels like attending a reunion for ageing and rather self-congratulatory punk rockers; it's good, though, on the pressures and politics of the industry. **DS** ★★☆☆☆

DREAMSCAPE

Second Sight Films, £10.99 (Blu-ray), £8.99 (DVD)

You want a really fortean movie? Try *Dreamscape*, in which scientists project psychics into the dreams of others, while a shady government group keeps an eye on this new method for their own nefarious ends. This flick has everything: scary monsters, conspiracy, ESP, weird experiments, nuclear bombs – and the beautiful Kate Capshaw. Dennis Quaid plays the psychic sax-playing chancer who dives into the nightmares of frightened boys and troubled presidents in a wonderfully gonzo exploration of weird dream phenomena. Yes, it feels a lot cheaper than *Inception* – but somehow it's also far more satisfying. **PL** ★★★★★

STAKE LAND II

Kaleidoscope Home Entertainment, £6.99 (DVD)

Stake Land was released in 2010, and established a world that was depressingly bleak but believable, a landscape of despair that sat well with fans of horror and post-apocalyptic cinema. Following a purposeful story arc, the film boasted interesting characters and, while it was hardly a feel-good ending, concluded on a fitting note that did not require any follow-up. Alas, here we are, as Martin (Connor Pablo) sets out to find Mister (Nick Damici) and settle a new score that brings him back to America. Where the first film was atmospheric and well-paced, *Stake Land II* is just a depressing affair: not in terms of the events depicted but in the 85 minutes wasted on watching this superfluous sequel, which only serves to water down everything that made its predecessor a noteworthy independent horror film. **LM** ★☆☆☆☆

SOUNDS PECULIAR

BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTEAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

As a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called 'the airwaves'.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the offshore 'pirate' pop stations of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality 'spoken word' content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of 'legitimate' broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortean topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR is your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortean topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...

The
Folklore
podcast

Podcast: The Folklore Podcast
www.thefolklorepodcast.com
Host: Mark Norman
Episodes Count: 25+
Format: Host and guest discussion, 30-60 minutes
Established: July 2016
Frequency: 1st and 15th of each month
Topics: Folklore, Cryptozoology, Ghosts, Forteana

For a podcast dedicated to folklore, the straightforwardly titled *The Folklore Podcast* had a great launch subject. For its first episode, the show chose to examine the relatively recent and still evolving subject of the Slenderman. Folklorist and associate professor Dr Andrea Kitta joined host Mark Norman to explore the birth of this now established folklore character. It is a great opportunity to explore the creation, growth, and spread of a folkloric motif, and a chance to understand how such ideas insert themselves into the cultural environment.

Dr Kitta has researched the subject extensively; she makes interesting connections between Slenderman and the Internet, which gave birth to him, and the growth of cyber-bullying. Norman allows her the space and time to communicate how the Slenderman figure developed and how it has evolved to meet growing audience expectations, becoming an icon of modern folklore and growing from an invented figure to an inspiration for murder (**FT316:4**, **317:30-37**). Slenderman is, according to Dr Kitta, a "flexible rhetorical tool" that can encapsulate any number of fears or threats, from the Internet itself to the evils of Capitalism (he's a 'man in a suit', after all).

Norman hosts some episodes of *The Folklore Podcast* solo, while on other instalments a relevant guest makes a sometimes-scripted contribution. His introduction defines folklore as "the beliefs, traditions, and culture of the people, passed on in the most part through the spoken word; [it] expresses our values, our shared ideas with others."

Although using the overall tag of 'folklore', the show tackles a wide range of fortean topics: ghosts, black dog apparitions, modern-day fairy sightings, the folklore attached to Yuletide celebrations, witch trials and 'old hag' syndrome. Cryptozoology occasionally features, with episodes covering Australian cryptid the Bunyip, and the inevitable look at the chubacabra – now there's a folklore motif that refuses to die.

Former *Monster Talk* (see 'Sounds Peculiar' **FT356:68**) contributor Benjamin Radford features on the chubacabra show, and Episode 18 is a joint presentation with the *Monster Talk* team on spectral hounds. Presenters Blake Smith and Dr Karen Stollznow join Norman not only to discuss dodgy dogs but also to look at how oral traditions have contributed to the spread and long-term survival of folklore motifs (a differently edited version of this episode was also released on the *Monster Talk* podcast feed.

Mark Norman is a UK-based researcher and writer, a committee member of the Folklore Society, and a member of the Board of the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, so he clearly knows his subject. Even more importantly, though, through his involvement with these organisations and his contacts within folklore research circles, he is able to attract a high calibre of guest, mostly fellow researchers from academia, to the podcast. It makes the project an invaluable resource for those interested in learning about folklore or for those seeking deeper knowledge or the lowdown on the latest research.

A good starting point might be Episode 15, which is a kind of Folklore 101 offering an introduction to the wider subject. With fellow Folklore Society committee member Dr Paul Cowdell, Norman explores the history of folklore, beginning with the very meaning of the word itself, then expanding to take in the wider discipline, following its development through time to the present day. If you want to know exactly what a 'folklorist' does all day, this is where you'll find out.

Norman insists that *The Folklore Podcast* will remain free to listeners, but he does produce an ezine supplement for each episode which is available for £0.99/$1.25. Each nicely designed e-magazine features an edited transcript of the episode, supplemented by additional features and resources, all focusing on the subject covered. It certainly adds to the overall usefulness of the podcast itself.

Strengths: Host Mark Norman's connections within folklore research circles means the podcast boasts a strong line-up of varied and knowledgeable guests.

Weaknesses: Norman's English voice can come across as lacking in oomph, and he sometimes (early on) appears to be reading from a written script. He loosens up as time goes on...

Recommended Episodes: Ep7 'Glitter and Gravedust' (the folklore of Hallowe'en); Ep12 'The Folklore of Gothic Chapbooks'; Ep17 'Folklore in Fantasy Fiction'; Ep19 'Knock Once For Yes' (Fraudulent Victorian Mediums and the Law); Ep22 'Devouring the Sun' (the folklore of eclipses).

Verdict: Ranging far beyond a simple definition of folklore, *The Folklore Podcast* is a useful resource for any fortean.

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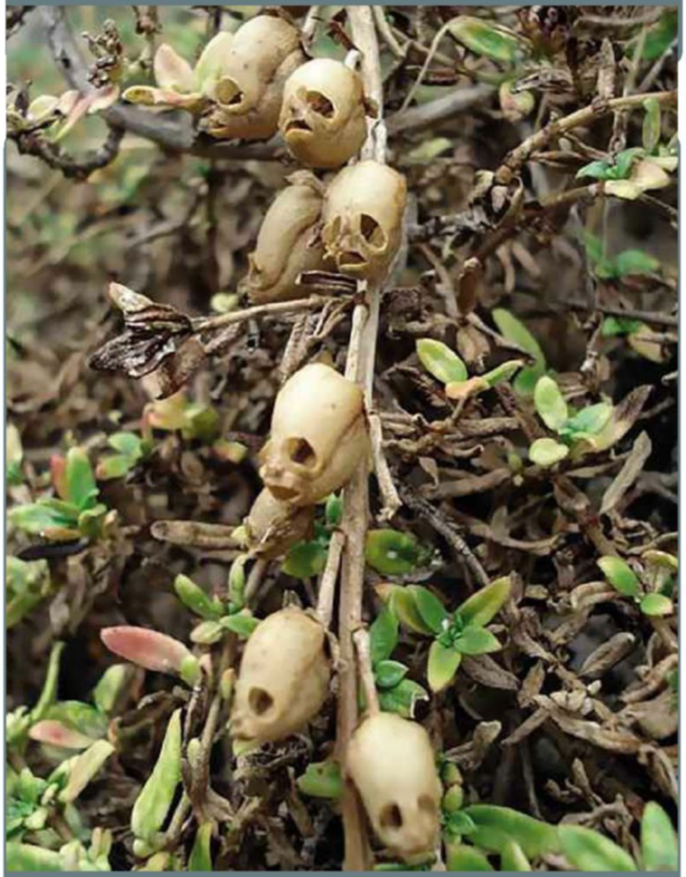
Ashtar and Ishtar

Richard George ('Classics and the counterculture', **FT356:55)** might have mentioned that, according to John Keel, many contactees claimed to have received messages from Ashtar of the Galactic Federation, who has even dictated whole books. Ashtar was originally the name of a Canaanite God associated with Venus as the Morning Star (Venus as the Evening Star was female and named Ishtar). It was Ashtar whom the prophet Isaiah (14:12) meant when he wrote: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" Lucifer, 'light-bearer', was the Roman name for the Morning Star.

George Adamski's *Inside the Spaceships*, 1955, which was ghost-written by Charlotte Blodget, explained that people from other worlds do not have names 'as we use them', but that he would call the Venusian Orthon, which had a 'meaning' he did not explain. Orthon is given as the name of a demon in Pierre de Lancre's *L'Incredulité et Mescreance du Sortilege*, 1622. This is not the most accessible of works, but the relevant passage was reprinted in Margaret Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921), which Adamski or Blodget might have read. The diabolic associations of the names Ashtar and Orthon ought to confirm the suspicions of those Christians who believe that ufonauts are agents of Satan.

Gareth J Medway
London

SIMULACRA CORNER



Alien skulls

Eddie de Oliveira found these simulacra of skulls or alien heads in the ruins of St George's Castle while on a summer holiday in Kefalonia, Greece. They are in fact capsules of snapdragons: for another dramatic picture, see **FT101:12**.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

Beast's number

Nick Warren's letter on 'Mystical numerology' [**FT354:70**] makes the point that 616 might be the correct number of the Beast; and indeed as far as I know the oldest known text pertaining to the Book of Revelation refers to 616, not 666 [**FT201:17**]. However, there may well be older texts and for a good reason. In the Book of Revelation, there is a prediction concerning 144,000 righteous men who will be saved from the number of the Beast. If we take that figure and divide it by six three times, we get 666.66 recurring. The link between these numbers makes a most persuasive case for the number being 666. It's just too coincidental. I noticed this myself 16 years ago although I have never researched any prior mentions of it. It is covered in more depth in my book, *Bible Code: An Ancient Secret Revealed* out now on Amazon in paperback and Kindle.

I would like to respond to Gareth Medway's response [**FT354:69**] to my letter [**FT351:71**]. I debated the possibility that saucer-shaped craft might have moved and looked like saucers; I never said or implied (as he claims) that "flying discs from outer space were invented in 1947". He points out that reports of round flying objects predate the famous Arnold sighting. I have no argument with that.

Simon van Someren
London

Conjoined

The Mutant News article about conjoined twin harbour porpoises [**FT356:12**] was fascinating for the conflicting statements from the scientist quoted. On the one hand Erwin Kampanje finally states that: "Conjoined twins will be more common than the 10 cases we know of at the moment, *but we are unaware of them because they are born at sea and are never found*" [my emphasis]. Yet he initially states with confidence that "normal twins are extremely rare in cetaceans". Well, all (non-captivity) cetaceans are born at sea. Therefore there could be lots of twins swimming around, but they are simply never found! Of course, he may be correct, but unless there is a databank with DNA samples of all cetaceans across the globe that has been analysed for the incidence of twins, then I reserve the right to wonder how he can (a) justify (and not qualify) his first statement, and (b) not have noticed its conflict/ inconsistency with his final statement. No wonder Old Charles was sceptical about scientists!

Rob Gandy
Wirral, Merseyside

Telltale bullet holes

Re: 'Faked Attraction' [**FT356:9**]: there must be some mistake here. I came to London in 1974 and one of the first 'sights' I visited was the Magdala pub in Hampstead to see if there was any sign of Ruth Ellis's bullets; it certainly cannot have been any later than 1978. The Magdala is faced with ruby-coloured glazed ceramic tiles (much like Leslie Green's tube stations), and there were certainly two small impact craters in this, which I took to be made by her bullets. Perhaps the putative drill was used to enlarge them to make them more obvious…

Roger J Morgan
London

Anybody out there?

David Hambling's 'Is there anybody out there?' [**FT356:14**] was an interesting round-up of the latest on SETI. The last paragraph raised in my mind another possibility. Maybe aliens are just like us and aren't really saying much. Could it be that there's intelligent life all over the Universe, but they're all listening?

Chris Tye
Leigh, Greater Manchester

Twin cluster

My wife recently bought a box of 18 eggs in a shop in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Seventeen of them had double yolks.

Ray Stephenson
Gateshead, Tyne and Wear

LETTERS

Conformist djinn

In his review of *Elf Queens and Holy Friars* [**FT355:59**], Jeremy Harte wonders why Islam could accommodate belief in djinn while the Christian Church could not. This is because the Bible doesn't mention fairies, while the Q'uran mentions djinn in more than 40 verses, pointing out that some of them heard Muhammad recite the Holy Book and accepted the tenets of Islam. In other words: belief in djinn is part of the Muslim faith, and some djinn are Muslims themselves.

Ulrich Magin
Hennef, Germany

"I am going to hatch"

I came across this story recently from the (Virginia) *Evening News* of 31 July 1899:

"A TALE FROM THE MYSTERIOUS EAST

"The last wonderful tale being told among the Burmese in Rangoon is concerning a monster egg. A few months ago near Shwebo the villagers heard a strange and mysterious voice in the jungle uttering in Burmese the words, "I am going to lay", which were repeated frequently several times a day for many days. Eventually the egg was laid, and its size is said to exceed that of ten large paddy baskets. Nobody will go near this egg, from which now come the words, "I am going to hatch" also repeated many times every day. [*Times of Burmah*]".

"Oh, him – he's always popping in and out"

PAUL TAYLOR

Have any readers heard other stories of talking eggs?

Richard Muirhead
By email

Parallel Life

On reading, 'Parallel Life?' by Alan Richardson [**FT356:76**], I was reminded of the novel *Lost Futures* (1992) by the great Lisa Tuttle. It's a masterpiece of both SF and psychological horror, similar in some ways to the better-known *The Affirmation* (1981) by her ex-husband Christopher Priest, and deserves to be as widely read.

David Sweeney
By email

The Tamám Shud Mystery

With reference to the "Tamám Shud Mystery" [**FT351:30-35**], this is one of those conundrums which have become mysterious simply because not all of the so-called "facts" fit into a neat frame of explanation, much like the Dyatlov Pass Enigma, or the *Mary Celeste* incident. The inability to find an explanation arises because time has passed and the facts take on sensationalist overtones that serve to colour and distort the evidence. Rather than Occam's Razor, those interested tend to turn to hyperbole and invention.

I am a collector of copies of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* and am aware of that book's inclusion in the Somerton Man quandary. Every time the story comes up, the book is referred to as a "rare first edition" of the work, which is patently not the case. Edward FitzGerald published his first translation of Khayyam in 1859 and it was a bust, soon consigned to a remainder bin outside Quaritch's bookshop for tuppence a throw. But it boomed after the Pre-Raphaelites discovered it, and FitzGerald went on to print four more versions, the last appearing after his death. Since then it has become one of the best-known poems in the English language – HH Munro took on his pen-name "Saki" from a late translation of the poem (it means "cup-bearer"); references to the poem litter the œuvre of Agatha Christie; even Douglas Mawson mused on the quatrains while pinned down by storms in the Antarctic (as recorded in his memoir, *Home of the Blizzard*). Those twopenny versions are now rare as hen's teeth and prices start at around £80,000.

However, the book at the heart of the Somerton Man mystery was published in the 1940s (the standard Omar Khayyam bibliography doesn't have a precise date, recording the year as "194X"). The publishing house was Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd., a New Zealand firm that, like many other publishers facing wartime paper restrictions, pumped out versions of the poem because it was a guaranteed money-spinner, it was out of copyright and it could be made in a small format (duodecimo, or sextodecimo) in order to maximise the number of units printed for sale. Also, like most publishers, they made a deluxe quarto format version and used the standing type to make the smaller versions in its wake. I have several W&T editions in my collection and, far from being rare and expensive, they can be found relatively easily for a cost of around $12 Australian on the second-hand book market.

Copies of the *Rubaiyat* were favourite gifts between lovers and friends during the early decades of last century, given its *carpe diem* message. In the context of this incident, the existence of the copy concerned has been exaggerated and given unnecessary force by being described as "rare and expensive". It wasn't; no more than Mrs Jestyn was a Russian spy rather than being a single parent in the 1940s trying to start a new scandal-free life; no more than the letters written in the back of the book were a "code" instead of being a reference to allow an ill-educated dockworker to cut stencils from pieces of cardboard; no more than the mysterious clothes of the victim were "anonymised", instead of having the old laundry labels removed after having been bought second-hand. In fact, rather than being a Cold War espionage incident this was probably no more than the sad suicide of a lovelorn and rejected man, betting everything on his flame's acceptance only to be told "Tamám Shud."

Craig Stanton
Wentworth Falls, New South Wales

Near-miss – with what?

I can add some extra information to "The View from the Cockpit" by Jenny Randles [**FT355:29**]. Jenny doesn't identify the flying instructor involved in the August 1979 incident, probably because he encountered so much 'banter' (to put it mildly) that he told me he just wanted to forget the whole thing.

The man in question was the late Laurie Adlington, Chief Flying Instructor (CFI) with 3 Counties Aero Club at Blackbushe. I had known him for some years and prior to becoming a civil flying instructor, he had been in the RAF based at the Empire Test Pilots School (ETPS) at Farnborough as a test pilot instructor, so must have been very experienced both in flying and in observing and reporting unusual occurrences. It was (and still is) normal for Blackbushe-based club aircraft to contact Farnborough Radar after departure (Blackbushe do not have their own radar), since the area where they operate – roughly between Reading, Basingstoke and Newbury – is very busy. Not only do Farnborough arrivals and departures transit this area but Odiham-based military helicopters operate there too.

I was the radar controller on duty at Farnborough when Laurie called in 'November X-ray', (actually G-BBNX, an aircraft I knew well, having flown it often myself). I had several other aircraft on frequency and watched them all to ensure they didn't get too close to each other or to Odiham airfield. As far as

I remember, it was a 'normal' sortie with the aircraft being manœuvred around the sky for about 45 minutes before returning to Blackbushe. After landing, Laurie phoned me and described what they had seen. I was amazed, as I had not seen any object solid enough to 'paint' on radar close to him at any time. Next time I went to the flying club to fly, Laurie supplied me with a sketch of the object. Back at work, I photocopied it and sent it to a scientist in RAE [Royal Aircraft Establishment] Space Department for his comments. He replied it could be a balloon with extra appendages stuck on (why?). Unfortunately, I lost this sketch in a house move.

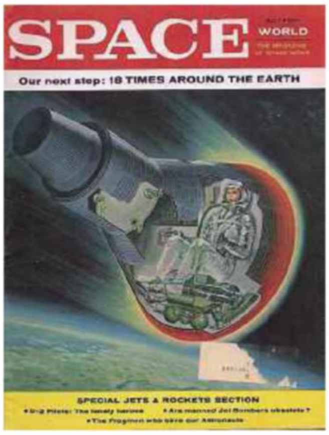
As a meeting of Omar Fowler's Surrey Investigation group on Aerial Phenomena (SIGAP) was pending, I invited Laurie to attend and this is when he told me he was trying to forget about it. I wasn't aware Omar was a member of BUFORA at the time, although I certainly was.

A few days after the incident, when it had appeared in the local press, I was contacted at work by an inventor called Searle who lived in Mortimer, a village just south-west of Reading. He claimed to have built and launched the object himself. I checked with my Farnborough Space Department contact and he said they knew all about Searle's invention, which (as described to me) was an electromagnetic cannon capable of launching projectiles.

Terry Clark
Chobham, Surrey

Space World

The article 'Astounding Science, Amazing Theories' [**FT355:40-45**] especially caught my eye, since it discusses Ray Palmer and his involvement in early UFO-related fantasy tales. I doubt many non-US readers will know this – and indeed not many Yanks will either – but Ray also once published a serious space science magazine called *Space World*. The magazine was founded in May 1960 by William Woolfolk, who was also a prolific science fiction author and screenwriter. Otto Binder, Wernher von Braun, Willy Ley, and other noted space scientists wrote most of the stories in the earlier issues. In 1963 Palmer acquired the magazine, changed its subtitle from "The news magazine of Astro-Science" to "The magazine of space news", and continued publishing it until his death in the 1970s. It then became officially associated with NASA for some time, and finally folded in 1989.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The magazine was heavily technical, with detailed stories about upcoming launches, new technologies, lists of satellites and frequencies. Many issues also featured a "Russian report" of activities by Soviet scientists. Some articles were also more fanciful depictions of the future of space travel, colonisation of new planets, and potential benefits to humanity. Advertising was very limited (we often wonder how Palmer made money), and included vendors of amateur rocketry components as well as schools of engineering. Of course, Ray also slipped in occasional links to his SF related titles (who wouldn't?). I happened across a few early issues some years ago and, having grown up during the heyday of the space race, started collecting them. Recently I acquired the copyright from the last publisher, and have started offering copies online for a few dollars each in an effort to finance acquisition of more issues and other materials related to the early space age. Interested readers can visit my website for more info (and one free issue, if interested). http://criticalenquiry.org/wp/space-world-issues/

Dick Joltes
Boston, Massachusetts

In front of your eyes

A while back, FT published correspondence concerning things having been abstracted by the Little People, and how you could get them back by asking politely for them. My theory, if that's not too grand a word, is that you are temporarily 'blinded' to whatever you're looking for, and that the 'asking' – whichever form it takes – jogs you out of that particular mental cul-de-sac. I think I wrote to you some years ago about how I managed to lose the song 'Good Vibrations' from a Beach Boys CD on which I *knew* it was. Little chance of the Little People making away with that… and it *was* on the playlist, only that I was unable to see it.

There may be several reasons for this blindness. One is what the psychologists call the 'search image' (I believe). I found out about this before I knew of the concept, since I observed that if I looked for something – a book, say, or a box – I had a mental image of it, and if the actual object looked different (e.g. being upside down) I was unable to see it even if looking straight at it. Being four-eyed, I have wasted a lot of time looking for my glasses, and this gets worse with age. Last autumn I found a way to avoid this: I bought a set of brightly coloured drinking glasses from a thrift shop, and now I keep one of these in every room, including the bathroom and the hallway. I have trained myself to put my glasses in one of those whenever I take them off (well, almost whenever) and the time spent searching for them has been drastically reduced. On the other hand, I'm still looking for my best scissors, which disappeared in plain sight from a bookshelf several months ago while I was sorting some clippings. I might try asking for them… but I bloody well daren't.

An amusing letter on this subject from Father David Sillince of Southampton appeared recently in the *Spectator* (18 Feb 2017). Here's the concluding paragraph: "Anybody worried that St Anthony is overworked could follow the more full-blooded Spanish practice of calling on St Cucufato. You tie three knots in your handkerchief and say: 'Cucufato, Cucufato, I'm tying up your balls; find me my [lost object] and I'll untie them again.' It always works, and he is never resentful."

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

Mouse utopia

Dr Edward Dutton's piece on John Calhoun's classic mouse experiment and its recent reinterpretation by Michael Woodley of Menie ('Of Mouse Utopias and Men', **FT356:56-57**) raises a number of points that require examination. First and foremost is the original purpose of Calhoun's experiment. It was not intended to model the effects of a utopian environment on humans using mice, but rather to explore the effects of overcrowding on mouse populations. Only after publication did it get picked up by popular culture as an analogy for human population growth. The supposed 'utopian' aspects of the experiment came about because Calhoun wished to study the effects of overcrowding alone, so to control the other variables in the experiment the mice were supplied with abundant replica habitats, a safe, disease-free environment and all the resources they might need to survive. The experiment was not intended to explore the effects of providing the mice with these.

Secondly, the experiment cannot be extrapolated to human populations for several reasons, primarily because the reproductive strategies and social behaviours of mice are vastly different from those of humans. Humans don't produce large litters of offspring; males do not fight to control harems of females, and humans' intelligence and ability to communicate mean they can develop more sophisticated strategies for dealing with crowded environments than mice can. It is clear from the photographs that the environments in which Woodley's mice were breeding were not particularly stimulus-rich, so the animals would not have had much to occupy them apart from breeding and social interaction. Humans live in a far more stimulating environment than this, so have more to distract them, even when living at high densities. At

LETTERS

the time the experiment was carried out, it was not the norm to provide stimulating environments for experimental animals; today it is, and had that been factored into the experiment the resulting mouse behaviours might well have been quite different.

Finally, there is the density that the mice were allowed to reach. They were specifically prevented from migrating out of the habitat in which they were placed to enable overcrowding to develop. It is clear from the photographs that they were literally teeming, living cheek-by-jowl with nowhere else to go. No matter how crowded humans get in cities, there are still options for them to move to less populated areas. You would not get conditions analogous to Calhoun's mice unless the entire Earth surface was packed with humans to the almost complete exclusion of anything else, by which time the idea of infinite resources would be a distant memory. Humanity could never find itself living in conditions analogous to these mice.

Moving on to the interpretation of the experimental results by Michael Woodley, there are a number of aspects of this that might cause eyebrows to be raised. Firstly, there is his assertion that technological advances since the industrial revolution have meant humans have stopped evolving because people who would previously have been too unfit to survive now do; but this is far from proven. Other researchers suggest that because there are far more people alive now, and far more genetic variants that are allowed to survive, there is vastly more potential for evolution, so it is actually speeding up.

Then there is the idea of mutational load and 'spiteful mutations'. No mutation is necessarily harmful; its harmfulness is determined by whether it makes an organism more, or less, fit to survive in the environment in which it finds itself. Mutations that are deleterious in one context can be helpful in another. Further to this is the belief that autism, mental illness, allergies, and even left-handedness are entirely the result of genetics, which was the prevalent idea in the 1960s when Calhoun's experiments were first being interpreted as analogies for human society. Today, however, they are considered to be significantly influenced by environment and upbringing, with genetics only playing a partial role.

Woodley then extrapolates this to consider intelligence, which he asserts modern society no longer selects for, and that IQ is going down as a result. This opens a whole new can of worms. For example, IQ is not a great measure of intelligence and is largely discounted as such by modern research; and in any case it is not going down, it is going up. The average IQ can be shown to have been increasing by about three per cent per decade since IQ tests were invented. Woodley is, it has to be said, aware of this, and has switched to an alternative measure, that of reaction time, but this assertion is tenuous. Elsewhere, the idea that society no longer produces towering geniuses like Newton and Einstein has been brandished to make the same point, that humanity is genetically deteriorating to the point that it cannot produce outstanding individuals. However, others counter this by pointing out that current science is much more reliant on research by large teams, so no individual stands out as a lone genius, while the Transhumanists in particular take the view that we are actually producing ever more brilliant people so that there are so many that they no longer stand out as extraordinary, and that this is all part of our accelerated rush towards the apotheosis of the Singularity. However you measure intelligence though, there is the fact that it is not solely genetically determined – at least 50 per cent of an individual's intelligence can be attributed to environmental factors such as family, environment, nutrition, education etc etc., so whether society is producing more or fewer intelligent people, it won't just be down to genetics.

Woodley also harks back to the assumption, made by Galton and his eugenicist successors, that stupid people breed more stupid people, while intelligent ones have intelligent offspring, and that if you leave them to it, the dumb members of the population will breed like rabbits and overwhelm the intelligent, causing civilisation to collapse into a new dark age until selection for intelligence re-asserts itself. The idea that civilisation is destined to collapse under a tide of imbecility was the central tenet of early 20th century eugenics, led to a hideous catalogue of human rights abuses, and has since been comprehensively exploded. Even a cursory contact with reality ought to be enough to disprove the idea – there are plenty of people who are significantly more intelligent than their parents, and, unfortunately, quite a few who are more stupid. As an ideology it is dead in the water and deserves to stay that way.

This view, and others expressed on religiosity and female fertility, suggest that Woodley's interpretation is not an objective one. He seems to be coming from a right-wing perspective that sees modern liberal culture as a sickness that needs to be eradicated. To do so he is extrapolating from a 50-year-old experiment that was not intended to be used as an analogy for human development and appears to be using outdated interpretations of how genetics works to espouse an Ayn Randesque view of humanity founded in the discredited pseudoscience of eugenics. The only conclusion you can draw from Calhoun's experiment is that if you let a mouse population grow in an unchecked manner in a contained environment with insufficient stimuli, they start to behave in a pathological manner and eventually go extinct. There are absolutely no lessons for any other organism that you can extrapolate from it, let alone predict the future of humanity.

Ian Simmons
Monkseaton, Tyne and Wear

In his experiment, Calhoun began from only four pairs of mice. The genetic diversity in the population was, therefore, from the start, seriously limited, and well beneath the diversity now thought to be necessary to build viable populations of any animal. The failure of the mouse colony, if it is to be explained genetically, is thus not to do with space or a failure to weed out mutations, but rather an initial genetic impoverishment.

Humans, unlike mice, have a complex culture. This means that much of our "intelligence" is held, not in our individual heads, but in our culture. Oral traditions, libraries, and now the Internet carry knowledge that the individual can readily access, and modern cultures know more than any previous cultures could even imagine. But if intelligence is problem solving, and not merely knowing stuff, again, humans solve problems collectively. Modern society, with its extraordinary communicative technologies, allows people to cooperate and work together. We still do dumb things, but we do extraordinary things too (think of all that wonderful technology, but also the assault on the major sources of disease and illness that allows the vast majority of us to anticipate long and healthy lives – which is of course, precisely the thing Dutton is railing against).

Dutton makes the odd claim that we do not know why the industrial revolution happened uniquely in Western Europe. Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, put forward a plausible hypothesis over a century ago, and one that has been debated ever since by sociologists and historians. (Weber's argument, very crudely, is that Protestant culture – yes, again culture, that all-important feature of human life – encouraged the reinvestment of profits, rather than their squandering in luxurious living. Weber admits that readily accessible supplies of coal and iron in northern Europe also helped a lot.)

Dutton's arguments are the worst sort of pseudoscience. More worryingly, behind this pseudoscience lies an alarming vision of what a 'good' society might be: one that allows the supposedly genetically inferior to die. Perhaps the crowning glory of our liberal culture is that, at our best, we care passionately for those who diverge from some notion of the genetically normal or healthy. We respect the dignity of all, regardless of their genes.

Dr Andrew Edgar
Cardiff University

It is worth reflecting on the notorious fact that on the whole the average intelligence of the wealthy and the aristocracy tends to decline over generations. Having used intelligence to get to the top of the pile, they no longer need to maintain it. This would not be the case if intelligence were largely hereditary. However, younger sons who will not inherit and therefore need to use their brains tend to show greater intelligence (e.g. Bertrand Russell).

I do not know what basis there is for saying that Greece, Rome and China collapsed on the verge of an industrial revolution; but I do know that this is not true of Rome. The Roman Empire achieved industrialisation on the basis of slave labour in the first century and maintained it until overrun by external invaders three centuries later.

The claims about mutation are wrong; they only make sense if you assume that everything that human beings do is the result of genetic mutation rather than of rational choice or other factors. To give just three examples: the increase in allergies is not due to mutation, but to environmental factors (by providing "healthier" environments in childhood, we prevent the full natural development of the immune system); the prevalence of right-handedness has (it has been suggested) nothing to do with genetics and more to do with the bias of the human heart towards the left side of the body (making it a better target for the right hand); and women have fewer children because efficient contraception allows them the choice which they did not have in previous centuries.

I challenge Dutton's implied view that mutation is a bad thing. Mutation is the driving force of evolution. Organisms mutate and, if lucky, end up better adapted to their environment, leaving successful descendants to form new species. What Dutton is suggesting is that the collapse of civilisation will drive humanity back to its unmutated form. This is a formula for stagnation and failure. Finally, may I cite the warning offered by Mark Greener about the danger of building theories on the basis of only one experiment [**FT356:61**]?

Martin Jenkins
London

I disagree with much of Edward Dutton's feature, especially extrapolation from Calhoun's study to human society. We do not have an environment that matches the "mouse utopia". Lower status humans find it hard to migrate to less suitable habitats because they live and are often born in such habitats. We still have resource shortages. We still have bad weather. And we still have epidemics: SARS, HIV/AIDS and that stalwart Flu seems able to mutate round all our scientific advances.

Perhaps the biggest difference is that we are subjected to those very efficient predators known as humans. The rich prey on the poor, the poor can only prey on each other, as some do, while politicians, priests and religious extremists pray (pun intended) on everybody. We cannot blame mutational overload for an increase in autism, allergies, and mental illness: there is a case to be made for environmental factors in each of these cases and left-handedness should not be in the list. Only the alleged increase in the incidence of entirely genetic disorders could be attributed to mutational overload. Social factors and cultural factors may induce the 'spiteful' mutations mentioned.

Woodley's argument, as presented by Dutton, reeking of genetic determinism and an elitist conservative view of society that seems to consider only the West, the USA and UK in particular. There is, however, one segment of society that can monopolise all the best habitats, which become increasingly identical, is immune to almost all resource shortages and bad weather, can avoid the effects of epidemics and is almost immune to human and other predators: the top one per cent.

Perhaps the rich *are* becoming less intelligent, less able to analyse and solve problems – I can cite the case of a multimillionaire politician calling out engineers to change a fuse – but less affluent layers of society are still subject to selection for intelligence, albeit a manifestation of intelligence that suits the needs of large corporations.

What I see, if Dutton's argument has any validity, is a class of super-rich people evolving into a population dominated by morons, an evolution masked by their ability to use technology and hire minders, or as they call them servants, bodyguards, doctors etc. Less affluent segments of society still need intelligence to survive. The lowest levels will need street smarts to stay alive, the middle classes need academic as well as practical intelligence and those in employment will need intelligence to stay employed.

Alex Kashko
Edinburgh

I found 'Of Mice Utopias and Men' both fascinating and unnerving. I am probably not the only reader to be reminded of the 2006 comedy *Idiocracy*, directed by Mike Judge. In the film, an "average American" is selected for a clandestine government hibernation programme, finally being awoken 500 years into the future, when the burgeoning population of the "underclass" has created a nation of idiots – which makes our hero, by default, the most intelligent guy in the society. Possible solutions to the "mutational meltdown" described by Dutton are at least as disturbing as the problem itself. Good job we can laugh about it.

Anthony Wilkins
Ripponden, West Yorkshire

Henry Cow called a track on their debut LP "Nirvana for Mice". This could have been an allusion to John Calhoun's experiment, as the band, formed at Cambridge University in 1968, were renowned for "erudite noise". They even provided the music for Robert Walker's production of Euripides's *Bacchæ*.

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

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WHY FORTEAN?

FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

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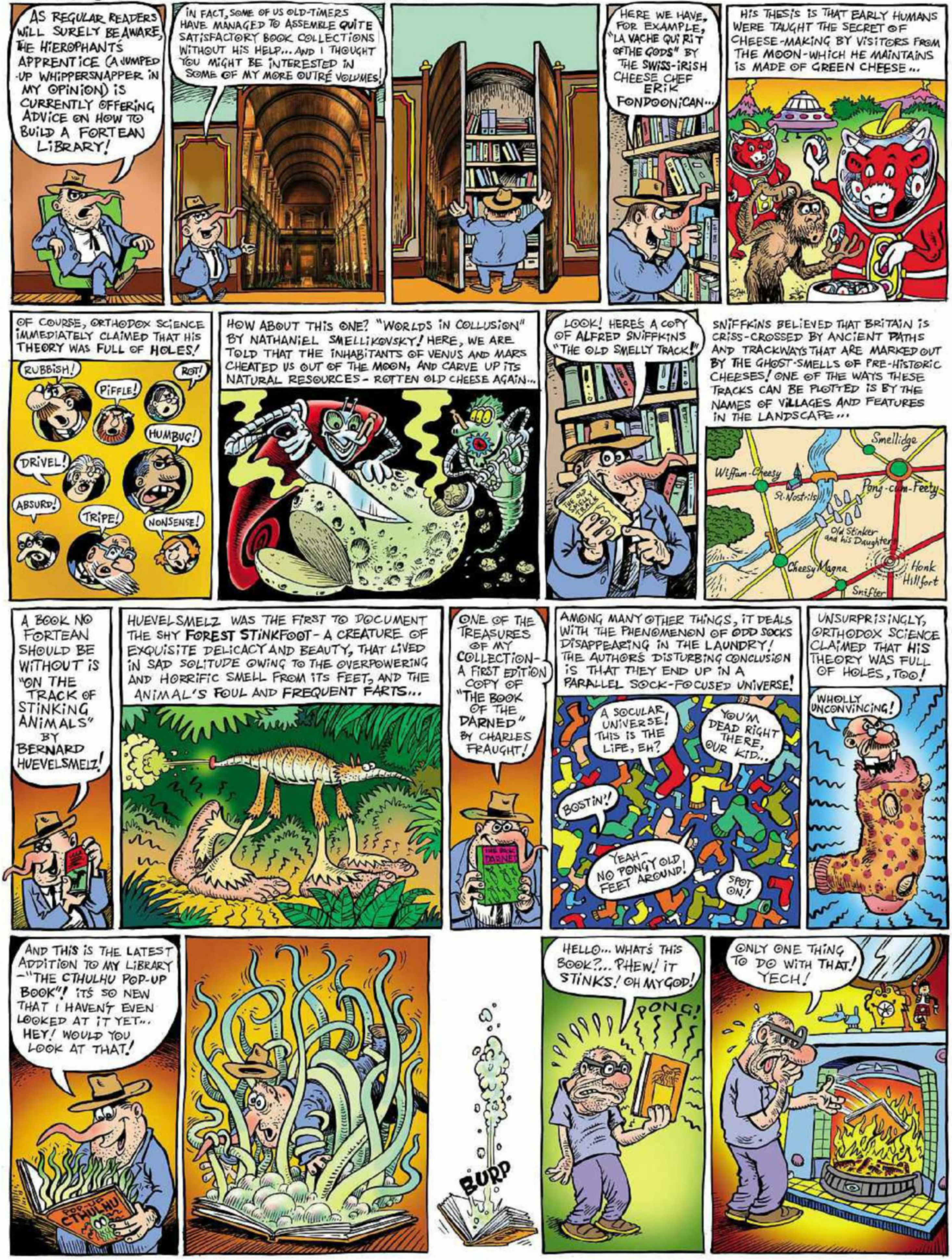
HUNT EMERSON and NILS ERIK GRANDE


AS REGULAR READERS WILL SURELY BE AWARE, THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE (A JUMPED-UP WHIPPERSNAPPER IN MY OPINION) IS CURRENTLY OFFERING ADVICE ON HOW TO BUILD A FORTEAN LIBRARY!
IN FACT, SOME OF US OLD-TIMERS HAVE MANAGED TO ASSEMBLE QUITE SATISFACTORY BOOK COLLECTIONS WITHOUT HIS HELP... AND I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN SOME OF MY MORE OUTRÉ VOLUMES!
HERE WE HAVE, FOR EXAMPLE, "LA VACHE QUI RIT OF THE GODS" BY THE SWISS-IRISH CHEESE CHEF ERIK FONDOONICAN...
HIS THESIS IS THAT EARLY HUMANS WERE TAUGHT THE SECRET OF CHEESE-MAKING BY VISITORS FROM THE MOON - WHICH HE MAINTAINS IS MADE OF GREEN CHEESE...
OF COURSE, ORTHODOX SCIENCE IMMEDIATELY CLAIMED THAT HIS THEORY WAS FULL OF HOLES!
RUBBISH!
ROT!
PIFFLE!
HUMBUG!
DRIVEL!
ABSURD!
TRIPE!
NONSENSE!
HOW ABOUT THIS ONE? "WORLDS IN COLLUSION" BY NATHANIEL SMELLIKOVSKY! HERE, WE ARE TOLD THAT THE INHABITANTS OF VENUS AND MARS CHEATED US OUT OF THE MOON, AND CARVE UP ITS NATURAL RESOURCES - ROTTEN OLD CHEESE AGAIN...
LOOK! HERE'S A COPY OF ALFRED SNIFFKINS "THE OLD SMELLY TRACK!"
THE OLD SMELLY TRACK
SNIFFKINS BELIEVED THAT BRITAIN IS CRISS-CROSSED BY ANCIENT PATHS AND TRACKWAYS THAT ARE MARKED OUT BY THE GHOST-SMELLS OF PRE-HISTORIC CHEESES! ONE OF THE WAYS THESE TRACKS CAN BE PLOTTED IS BY THE NAMES OF VILLAGES AND FEATURES IN THE LANDSCAPE...
Smellidge
Wiffam-Cheesy
St. Nostrils
Pong-cum-Feety
Old Stinker and his Daughter
Cheesy Magna
Honk Hillfort
Snifter
A BOOK NO FORTEAN SHOULD BE WITHOUT IS "ON THE TRACK OF STINKING ANIMALS" BY BERNARD HUEVELSMELZ!
HUEVELSMELZ WAS THE FIRST TO DOCUMENT THE SHY FOREST STINKFOOT - A CREATURE OF EXQUISITE DELICACY AND BEAUTY, THAT LIVED IN SAD SOLITUDE OWING TO THE OVERPOWERING AND HORRIFIC SMELL FROM ITS FEET, AND THE ANIMAL'S FOUL AND FREQUENT FARTS...
ONE OF THE TREASURES OF MY COLLECTION - A FIRST EDITION COPY OF "THE BOOK OF THE DARNED" BY CHARLES FRAUGHT!
THE BOOK DARNED
AMONG MANY OTHER THINGS, IT DEALS WITH THE PHENOMENON OF ODD SOCKS DISAPPEARING IN THE LAUNDRY! THE AUTHOR'S DISTURBING CONCLUSION IS THAT THEY END UP IN A PARALLEL SOCK-FOCUSED UNIVERSE!
A SOCULAR UNIVERSE! THIS IS THE LIFE, EH?
YOU'M DEAD RIGHT THERE, OUR KID...
BOSTIN'!
YEAH - NO PONGY OLD FEET AROUND!
SPOT ON!
UNSURPRISINGLY, ORTHODOX SCIENCE CLAIMED THAT HIS THEORY WAS FULL OF HOLES, TOO!
WHOLLY UNCONVINCING!
AND THIS IS THE LATEST ADDITION TO MY LIBRARY - "THE CTHULHU POP-UP BOOK"! IT'S SO NEW THAT I HAVEN'T EVEN LOOKED AT IT YET... HEY! WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT!
POP-UP CTHULHU
BURP
HELLO... WHAT'S THIS BOOK?... PHEW! IT STINKS! OH MY GOD!
PONG!
ONLY ONE THING TO DO WITH THAT! YECH!

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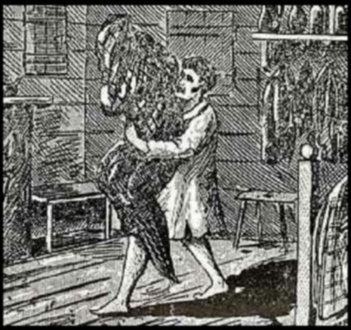

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FORTEAN TIMES 359

ON SALE 12 OCT 2017

STRANGE DEATHS

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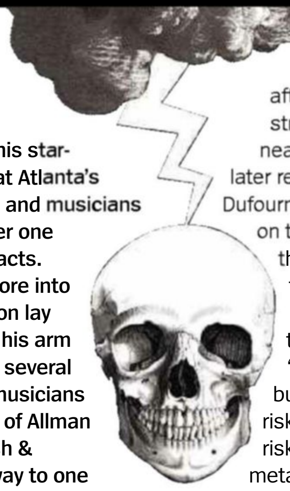

When Colonel Bruce Hampton slowly fell to his knees during the finale of his star-studded birthday concert at Atlanta's Fox Theater on 1 May, fans and musicians alike thought it was another one of his quirky performance acts. Brandon 'Taz' Niederauer tore into a blistering solo as Hampton lay motionless just feet away, his arm draped over a speaker. For several more minutes, dozens of musicians – including Warren Haynes of Allman Brothers Band and Phil Lesh & Friends fame – jammed away to one of Hampton's favourite songs, "Turn On Your Love Light". He fans danced and the musicians smiled as they waited for him to get up. But the eccentric guitarist and singer known as the forefather of the jam band was dead. He had turned 70 the day before. He founded several bands, including the Hampton Grease Band and the Aquarium Rescue Unit. Earlier in the evening, he had sung Fixing To Die: "Feeling funny in my mind, Lord / I believe I'm fixing to die / Well, I don't mind dying / But I hate to leave my children crying." *Victoria (BC) Times Colonist, 3 May 2017*.

Tanzanian police detained a pastor after two worshippers drowned while being baptised in the River Ungwasi near Rombo in the north of the country. It is not clear how the pastor and the other worshippers involved managed to survive. They are members of a local church, Shalom, part of the charismatic Christian movement. Baptism in a river rather than in church is seen as a way of re-enacting the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan. *BBC News, 17 July 2017.*

On 9 July, the body of Leo Adonis, 38, was found inside Halemaumau Crater on Kilauea volcano in Hawaii, about 250ft (76m) below a walking trail used by the public. Two hikers walking the trail the previous day had found his dumped backpack containing a suicide note. His body was found the following morning by rangers searching by helicopter. Adonis was born Gregory Michael Ure. According to his father, he lived in Petaluma in California but "really loved Hawaii". *[AP] Sun, 11 July 2017*.

A leading French philosopher, psychoanalyst and newspaper columnist, best known for her work on risk-taking, drowned after attempting to save two children at Pampelonne beach on the French Riviera. Anne Dufourmantelle, 53, entered the water after the children got into difficulty in strong winds at Pampelonne beach, near St Tropez, on 21 July. Lifeguards later rescued the children unharmed. Dufourmantelle wrote numerous essays on the importance of taking risks and the need to accept that exposure to any number of possible threats is a part of everyday life, including the book *In Praise of Risk* (2011). "It is said: 'to risk one's life', but perhaps one should say 'to risk life', [since] being alive is a risk," said Dufourmantelle. "Life is metamorphosis and it begins with this risk." *BBC News, 24 July; D.Telegraph, 25 July 2017*.

Prof Brian Bellhouse, 80, a former Oxford don resident in Winchelsea, East Sussex, was trampled to death by a herd of cows in a field in Guestling on 12 June. He died at the scene despite another walker hearing screams and calling emergency services. A helicopter was scrambled and paramedics from the air ambulance began CPR, but they were unable to save him. Prof Bellhouse, an Emeritus Professor of Magdalen College, invented a device for needle-free injections. He co-founded PowerJect in 1993 and became a millionaire in 1997 when the company was floated with a £50 million market value. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 14 June 2017*.

A week earlier, another millionaire died when his dog jumped on to the controls of his tractor and set it in motion. Derek Mead, 70, was using the 10-ton JCB telehandler to lift hay bales at his 2,000-acre farm in Hewish, Somerset. He had stopped to open a gate on 4 June when the JCB lurched forward and rolled over him. It was thought that his Jack Russell had disengaged the handbrake. He died of a heart attack despite the efforts of air ambulance paramedics. His family founded the Yeo Valley dairy brand and own vast tracts of Somerset. His brother Roger also died in a farming accident when he rolled his tractor on a steep hill. *D.Mail, 6 June 2017*.

A former Czech soldier died after poisoning himself with yew tree needles. Petr Smísek, 42, believed the tree, which has a bark used in anti-cancer medicine, would give him a "natural high", Oldham coroner's court heard. However, after he had smoked the needles, his friend checked online and discovered they were a deadly poison with no antidote. Mr Smísek died later that day. Verdict: Misadventure. *Metro, 10 July 2017.*

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